III. 1. Introduction

The adolescence, the stage of formal operations in Piaget’s division, is the peak of intellectual functions and cognitive development. So making them autonomous may be comparatively easier from a psycho-social point of view. But, from the pedagogic point, this needs very careful and measured planning. In the last chapter, the psycho-social approaches to be considered have been the focus of attention. Here, in this chapter, it is the philosophical and psychological perspective behind the notion of autonomous learning that is examined.

III.2. Learning to learn

The simple phrase ‘learning to learn’ is no stranger to the researchers in education and learning. Autonomous learning aims at nothing but this simple phrase. In Macaro’s words, (2001:3) “Learning to learn is one of the first major steps towards that elusive concept that everyone talks about but nobody ever really defines: autonomy”. Dickinson (1987:35) also says that the prominent educational aim is the development of personal autonomy and the improvement of learning efficiency.

Learning how to learn is a matter first of developing knowledge about learning process and about oneself as a learner, secondly of planning learning, and thirdly of discovering and then using appropriate and preferred strategies to
achieve the objectives specified by the plans. Flavel (1979) uses the term ‘metacognition’ to describe this ability and analyses it into four elements:

1. Metacognitive knowledge – what the learner knows about learning and himself with respect to his learning.

2. Metacognitive experiences – conscious, cognitive or affective experiences that accompany any intellectual exercise.

3. Goals or tasks—the achievement and the intellectual exercise where knowledge and experience is to be applied,

4. Action or Strategies- How an individual goes about achieving his objectives. (p.196)

Learning about a new subject, such as beginning to learn a foreign language, may be largely a matter of developing metacognitive knowledge about it. Thus the learner has to discover what appropriate learning strategies are for him, through trying out the kinds of activities the teacher advises, and through trying out strategies from other learning experiences. Stern's (1983:411) characterization of the good language learner—that a good language learner exhibit four basic sets of strategies namely: an active planning strategy, an academic learning strategy, a social learning strategy and an effective strategy—can be seen in terms of the individual’s successful development of metacognition—or learning to learn—with respect to modern languages. A
detailed description on metacognitive learning strategies is in the coming chapter.

Finally, learning how to learn a foreign language/a second language is a desirable prerequisite of learner-centered methods. Here the learner is supposed to know both meta-linguistic as well as meta-cognitive knowledge. Meta-linguistic knowledge includes the appropriacy factor, which takes care of selection of expression, tone, and even body language. This is particularly true of those which are concerned with giving learners opportunities to practise using the language for communicative purposes. Hence it is an accepted fact that the most effective way to give learners opportunities to use the target language communicatively is to divide the class into pairs or small groups. In doing this, the teacher is freeing the learners from absolute control over what they say and how they say it, and since the teacher can attend to only one group at a time, the learners themselves must take on many responsibilities for their own learning. Thus teaching the learners to learn how to learn is making them autonomous in every aspect of the term---learner autonomy.

III.3. ‘Learning to learn’ leading to autonomy

‘Learner autonomy’ has been a buzz word in foreign language education in the past decades, especially in relation to life-long learning skills. It has transformed old practices in the language classroom and has given origin to self
access language learning centers around the world such as the SALC at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan, the SAC at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and ELSAC at the University of Auckland (more about SALC is given towards the end of this chapter). As the result of such practices, language teaching is now seen as language learning and it has placed the learner as the centre of our attention in language learning education.

The term ‘learner autonomy’ was first coined by Henri Holec in 1979. Many definitions have since been given to the term, depending on the writer, the context and the level of debate educators have come to have been outlined in Chapter 1. It has been considered as a personal human trait, as a political measure or as an educational move. This is because autonomy is seen either (or both) as a means or as an end in education.

One of the key aspects to consider in defining learner autonomy is whether we view it as a means to an end (learning a foreign language) or as an end in itself (making people autonomous learners). These two options do not exclude each other, both of them can be part of our views towards language learning or learning in general.

Wikipedia gives eight principles of learner autonomy:
• Autonomy means moving the focus from teaching to learning. (How do learners learn, what mental processes are involved in learning, what individual styles and strategies are used etc.)

• Autonomy affords maximum possible influence to the learners. (Learners decide the materials, methods and strategies.)

• Autonomy encourages and needs peer- support and cooperation. (Cooperative learning and Collaborative learning are the ways through which autonomy in second language learning can be ensured)

• Autonomy means making use of self/peer assessment. (Taking decisions independently means assessing one’s own actions, and peer assessment is only complementary to self-assessment)

• Autonomy requires and ensures 100% differentiation. (More focus on the individual and individual differences was actually propelling the idea of autonomy in all walks of life.)

• Autonomy can only be practiced with student logbooks which are a documentation of learning and a tool of reflection. (Self assessment in autonomous learning is not momentary, it is continuous and cumulative. Besides, reflecting upon one’s own achievements and lapses is another nature to be developed among autonomous learners.)
• The role of the teacher as supporting scaffolding and creating room for the development of autonomy is very demanding and very important. (Scaffolding is not only by the teachers but by peers as well. Lack of scaffolding ensuring pre requisite knowledge to construct new knowledge is one of the main drawbacks of teaching.)

• Autonomy means empowering students, the classroom can be restrictive so are the rules of chess or tennis, but the use of technology can take students outside of the strictures of the classroom and can take the outside world into the classroom. (The role of ICT in autonomous learning cannot be ignored.)

With these principles in mind when we take stock of the present methodology practised in our system, we feel that we have to go a long way to reach this ultimate aim, to know what happens around us, and to get trained to better ourselves, both as teachers and learners

III. 4. Philosophical underpinning

Before going to the detailed analysis of the methods of learner autonomy, an overview of the disparate philosophical perspectives to be converged towards learner autonomy will be useful to comprehend the term in its complete conceptual level. Drawing on traditions reaching back to the turn of the 20th
century, we come across a number of philosophical perspectives and research traditions that contributed to the idea of autonomy. These include humanistic education, experiential learning, system-functional linguistics, collaborative teaching (cooperative learning) and psycho linguistically motivated classroom-oriented research. Each has theoretical and empirical basis to provide a rationale for each perspective in learner autonomy.

III.5. Humanistic psychology

Humanistic psychology has had an influence on language education in a number of respects. It provides a rationale for several of the more prominent methods such as Community Language Learning, the Silent Way and the Suggestopedia. It has also influenced curriculum theorizing, particularly learner oriented approaches to curriculum development. The influence of humanism can be traced to most of the theories developed in later years. The humanistic movement in language teaching represents an eclectic grouping of ideas developed, in the fields of general education and psychology. Influential authors in the development of the ideational basis of humanistic education in general include Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1961). Underhill (1989) identifies seven themes in humanistic psychology:

1. High level health and well-being

2. The whole person
3. The human motivation towards self-realization

4. Change and development

5. Education as a life-long process

6. Respect for an individual’s subjective experience

7. Self-empowerment (p-25)

High level health and well-being is the ultimate aim of any kind of learning. The concept of the ‘whole person’ is not anything new at all. In the introductory chapter, the great tradition of Greek philosophical thought believing in the inner light of the whole person was mentioned. The current notion of considering individual difference and the idea of inclusive education have originated from individual freedom and self-empowerment. Though the humanistic movement has made a considerable contribution to the language teaching community’s understanding of what learner-centered teaching can entail, the individual differences are not given due consideration under this, says Tudor (1996). On the other hand humanistic movement helped language teaching creating a trend towards a more learner-responsive or learner centered approach. Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1961) influenced this approach by allocating personal concerns of learners a central place in language teaching and thereby moving away from a view of language teaching in which centre stage is held by the language code rather than the messages learners wish to convey. This has led to the
incorporation of a variety of affectively-oriented or personal-expression based activities. Tudor (1996) in a well balanced and insightful evaluation of the humanistic movement in language teaching recognizes five main strands in humanistic thinking, which he labels H 1, H 2 …H 5. These are:

(H 1) Feelings, including both personal emotions and esthetic appreciation: This aspect of Humanism tends to reject whatever makes people feel bad, or whatever destroys or forbids esthetic enjoyment.

(H 2) Social relations: This side of humanism encourages friendship and cooperation and opposes whatever tends to reduce them.

(H 3) Responsibility: This aspect of humanism accepts the need for public scrutiny, criticism and correction and disapproves of whomever or whatever denies their importance.

(H 4) Intellect, including knowledge, reason, and understanding: This aspect fights against whatever interferes with the free exercise of the mind, and is suspicious of anything that cannot be tested intellectually.

(H 5) Self-actualization, the quest for full realization of one’s own deepest true qualities: This aspect believes that since conformity leads to enslavement, the pursuit of uniqueness brings about liberation (quoted in Leslie Dickinson 1991).
Curran, the originator of Community Language Learning (CLL), (1972,1976), conceptualizes the language learning process in strongly theological terms such as ‘incarnation’ and ‘redemption’ and his approach to teaching is heavily influenced by the methods of counseling therapy. CLL has no preset syllabus; the teacher’s role is that of a resource person and a counselor. His method was in fact a kind of autonomous learning envisaged by the modern educationist and psychologist. To sum up, the humanistic movement has contributed considerably to different methods of teaching language taking learner variability and self-learning into consideration.

III.6. Experiential language learning

Experiential language learning is related to humanistic psychology that personal experiences have important role in the growth of personality. Thus, Rogers (1975) argues that the individual’s self-concept is a social product that is shaped gradually through interaction with the environment. The individuals make sense of the world through constructs which they have developed for themselves over a long period of time. People function in terms of their expectations about future events, making plans on the basis of expected outcomes. They are active and responsible participants making choices based on reality as they perceive it. These personal constructs suggest a proactive system through which learning becomes one’s own experience. In the light of this belief, the importance for
personal growth of learning experiences or the process of learning in schools deserves serious attention. Good teachers have probably always realized the importance of the process for the product. Experiential learning theory however, invites conscious attention to the importance of the learners' subjective experiences, attitudes and feelings about their own learning. The learning experiences gained in the process of learning will have a cumulative effect on the development of the learners' cognitive and affective characteristics, their views of themselves as learners. If we can keep learners to improve their views of themselves as learners, they may become better learners, able to utilize their learning potential fully.

Kolb (1984: 42) advances a general theoretical model of experiential learning as follows:
According to this model, learning is essentially seen as a process of resolution of conflicts between two dialectically opposed dimensions, called the ‘prehension’ and ‘transformation’ dimensions.

The perhension dimension refers to the way in which the individual grasps experience. This dimension can be seen as two modes of knowing, ranging from what Kolb calls grasping via ‘apprehension’ to what he calls grasping via ‘comprehension’. Apprehension is instant, intuitive knowledge without a need for rational inquiry or analytical conformation. The other end of the dimension, grasping via comprehension, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of conscious learning, where by comprehension introduces order and predictability to the flow of unconscious sensation. This dimension is thus concerned with the ways of grasping reality through varying degrees of emphasis or unconscious and conscious learning.

The transformation dimension, on the other hand, refers to the transformation of experience by orientation towards reflective observations as against actions and active experimentation. An individual with an active orientation is ready to take risks, attempting to maximize success and showing little concern for errors or failures. An individual with an excessive reflective orientation, on the other hand, may be willing to sacrifice successful performance in order to avoid errors,
preferring to transform experiences through reflective observation (Kolb 1984:42-60).

The polar ends of the two dimensions will thus yield four orientations to learning:

1. Concrete experience, with an involvement in personal experiences and an emphasis on feeling over thinking. This is an ‘artistic’ orientation relying, on intuitive decision-making.

2. Abstract conceptualization using logic and a systematic approach to problem-solving, with an emphasis on thinking, manipulation of abstract symbols and a tendency to neat and precise conceptual systems.

3. Reflective observation, focusing on understanding the meaning of ideas and situations by careful observation, is being concerned with how things happen by attempting to see them from different perspectives and relying on one’s own thoughts, feelings and judgment.

4. Active experimentation, with an emphasis on practical applications and getting things done, influencing people and changing situations, and taking risks in order to accomplish things. (Kolb 1984:68-9)

Experiential learning is seen as a four-stage cycle combining all of these orientations. Thus, simple everyday experience is not sufficient for learning. It must also be observed and analyzed consciously. Only experience that is
reflected upon seriously will yield its full measure of learning, and reflection must in turn be followed by testing new hypotheses in order to obtain further experience. It can be argued, in fact, that theoretical concepts will not become part of the individual’s frame of reference until they have been experienced meaningfully on a subjective emotional level. Reflection plays an important role in this process by providing a bridge, as it were, between experience and theoretical conceptualization. The process of learning is seen as the recycling of experience at deeper levels of understanding and interpretation forming knowledge constructs which entails the idea of lifelong learning which is meant by the term ‘learner autonomy’ here.

As mentioned earlier, different educational psychologists were influenced by the idea of humanistic approach to learning, and different ideas and approaches have developed from the humanistic perspective. Cooperative learning and collaborative teaching are two such pedagogic constructs stemmed out of humanistic psychology.

Vygotsky (1987) thought that collaboration works as a powerful tool in stimulating mental development to the extent that the child is able to productively participate in the collaboration. When something becomes too difficult, however, collaboration cannot be used to push the child further. Vygotsky states that in collaboration the child solves problems that are proximal to his level of
development with relative ease. Further on, however, the difficulty grows. Ultimately problem becomes too difficult to resolve even in collaboration. The child’s potential for moving from what he can do to what he can do only in collaboration is the most sensitive index of the dynamics of development and the degree of success that will come to characterize the child’s mental activity (Vygotsky 1987:210).

According to Vygotsky, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is “the distance between the actual developmental levels as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). Challenges that are beyond the child’s independent ability but which can be achieved in collaboration with another push the child’s development forward. In collaboration with another, what was impossible becomes possible—the child can achieve what s/he could not accomplish alone and this achievement works to advance his or her mental functioning. In its power to conceptualize the role of collaboration in the child’s mental development, the ZPD has come to be used less as an assessment tool and more in order to understand how learning occurs. The concept of ZPD has helped to increase appreciation of how dialogue, collaboration, and other forms of face-face interaction function to stimulate cognitive development.
III.7. Collaborative language learning and teaching

Collaborative language learning and teaching include the collaboration among teachers, learners, researchers and curriculum specialists. All these four groups may wish to experiment with alternative ways of organizing teaching and learning; they may be concerned with promoting a philosophy of cooperation rather than competition; they may wish to create an environment in which learners, teachers and researchers are teaching and learning from each other in an equitable way; or they wish to experiment with ways of incorporating principles of learner-centeredness into their programs. Studies and researches in the 80’s and 90’s of the last century in cooperative learning were supported by process-oriented models of second language acquisition. Bejarano (1987), Long (1981), Bessano and Christison (1988), Nunan (1989.a) and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) were the researchers to be mentioned in this respect. Their studies and findings reached at the following conclusions:

- There is a link between the communicative approach to foreign language instruction and cooperative learning in small groups. The study demonstrates how to forge a link between the content and the process of instruction (Bejarano, 1987:483).

- The small group methods significantly outperformed students in the whole-class method (Nunan, 1989.a).
The tasks that are more beneficial for language acquisition are those in which learners are required to negotiate meaning among them in the course of completing an interactive task are particularly suited to language development (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991).

Learners can take partial or full responsibility for a number of things like arranging classroom furniture before class, keeping attendance records, decorating bulletin boards, carrying out classroom maintenance, setting up equipments for films, handing out and replacing materials, collecting money for coffee break supplies, generating advice on disciplinary matters, making announcements, welcoming and greeting new students and introducing them to class routines.

On the academic side, students can also be involved in curriculum work such as the selection of activities, goal setting, and materials development.

Monitoring and evaluation is the last area where learners can be encouraged to collaborate through tasks such as self-assessment and progress monitoring charts.

Collaborative practices of teachers have been around for many years and most of what one hears remains anecdotal. Some years ago in a large-scale investigation of the curriculum practices of some 800 teachers (reported in Nunan 1988), teachers nominated team teaching as a highly favored option in
their professional practice. However, when it came to documenting, the collaborative practices of the teachers, very few of them had anything to report. For promoting learner autonomy, collaborative teaching can be seen as one of the novel and motivating strategies

**III.8. Cooperative learning**

The past few years have been productive in scholarly writing advocating the use of cooperative learning in the second language (L2) classroom. A basic premise in this regard is that “language acquisition is determined by a complex interaction of a number of critical input, output, and context variables and that cooperative learning has a dramatic positive impact on almost all the variables critical to language acquisition” (Kagan 1992: p.1). This is because small group work enriches the language classroom with comprehensible, developmentally appropriate, redundant, and somewhat accurate input as described by Krashen (2003) as well as promoting frequent communicative, and referential classroom talk in a supportive, motivating, and feedback-rich environment.

Furthermore, Olsen and Kagan (1992) maintained that cooperative learning offers three major benefits relative to (a) providing a richness of alternatives to structure interaction among students, (b) addressing content area learning and language development needs within the same organizational framework, and (c) increasing opportunities for individualized instruction. Along similar lines, Coelho
(1992) argued that cooperative learning provides a culturally appropriate learning environment as it empowers minority students through improving race relationships and encouraging exploratory talk to assist students in comprehending and internalizing new ideas and information. Similarly, McDonell (1992) argued that the cooperative classroom is well-suited for second language learners as it enables them to communicative learning as it applies to L2 instruction proposed instructional guidelines as well as suggested approaches for staff development and teacher training.

According to Good and Brophy (1987), out of forty one studies twenty-six found significantly greater learning in classes using cooperative methods. They argue that ‘… although the effects of cooperative learning on achievement appear to be basically motivational, the key is not motivation to win competitions against other teams but motivation to assist once teammates to meet their individual goals and thus ensure that the team as a whole will do well (Good and Brophy 1987, p.438). Slavin aptly summarizes the theoretical, empirical and practical advantages of cooperative learning in the following manner:

We can no longer ignore the potential power of the peer group, perhaps the one remaining free source for improving schools. We can no longer see the class as thirty or more individuals whose only instructionally useful interactions are with the teacher, where peer interactions are
unstructured or off-task.... simply allowing students to work together is unlikely to capture the power of the peer group to motivate students to perform (p.128).

The aforementioned claims regarding the effectiveness of cooperative learning are supported by strong empirical research evidence. In a review of classroom research on academic achievement, Slavin (1995) identified 90 well-controlled studies that made 99 comparisons of cooperative learning and other control methods. The review revealed that the overall effects of cooperative learning on achievement were clearly positive as 63 of the comparisons significantly favored cooperative learning and only 5 comparisons significantly favored the control groups. Furthermore, The pivotal role of classroom interaction as a determinant of language acquisition whereby language learners negotiate and make meaning has been recognized for some time now both in L1 (first language) and L2 situations (Barnes, 1976; Seliger, 1977; Long and Porter, 1985). Several studies have also shown that cooperative learning is particularly effective in improving the academic achievement of minority students and among medium and low achieving students (Martino and Johnson, 1979; Armstrong et al., 1981; Skon et al., 1981; Smith et al., 1981; Nevin et al., 1982; Sharan et al., 1984). This suggests that cooperative learning may be especially useful in English as a Second Language (ESL) situation where learners are still
developing their skills and knowledge of the syntactic and semantic system of a
language other than their own.

Furthermore, there is some conflicting evidence in the literature regarding
whether cooperative learning is equally beneficial to students at all levels of prior
achievement. For instance, Robinson (1990) maintained that high achievers
could be held back by having to explain materials to their low-achieving group-
mates. Meanwhile, other researchers argued that high-achievers would benefit
most from cooperative learning because they provide frequent elaborated
explanations. Evidence from experimental studies supports neither views.

The different perspectives described here so far aim at learning generally and
learning a second language specifically with varying degrees of autonomy. A
fully autonomous learner is totally responsible for making the decisions,
implementing them and assessing the outcomes without any teacher
involvement. The development of such independence is a question of enabling
learners to manage their own learning. They need to gain an understanding of
language learning in order to be able to develop their skills consciously and to
organize their learning tasks. Learners need not see themselves as consumers
of language courses; they can also become producers of their own learning
(Holec 1987).
Another important key for the development of autonomous learning is reflection and awareness-raising of one’s own learning. Conscious reflection on learning experiences and the sharing of such reflections with other learners in cooperative groups makes it possible to increase one’s awareness of learning. The teacher’s task is to provide learners with the necessary information and support at suitable points. Such learner guidance involves knowledge about learning strategies and, at a higher level of abstraction, metacognitive knowledge about learning.

III. 9. Reflection and consciousness-raising

In terms of experiential learning theory, an essential part of such learner training is that it includes the cyclic process of having ‘hands-on’ experience of learning strategies and metacognitive knowledge, reflecting on such experience and conceptualizing it, thereby gaining a conscious understanding of the knowledge. In this context it is worth mentioning the concept of ‘consciousness-raising’ (C-R), as viewed by Rutherford and Smith (1988): “by consciousness-raising we mean the deliberate attempt to draw the learners’ attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language” (p.274). They question the then current assumption that formal grammar has a minimal or even non-existent role to play in language pedagogy and that theoretical linguistics has virtually nothing to contribute to what goes on the class room. In his article Smith (1983)
concludes that C-R cannot be treated simplistically. He believes that there is every reason to accept the older, intuitively attractive version which says that explicit knowledge may aid acquisition via practice; learners who cannot articulate rules may still have access to the relevant information in explicit knowledge; learners who do not have such access may well at one time have had access to such information when the relevant rule had not yet been automatised; learners who do not appear to automatised rules that they have had in explicit knowledge for long periods to time may simply not be disposed to spend the extra time and energy transferring the information to implicit knowledge. That means fossilization has occurred in that part of their learning development where learning had in fact preceded acquisition (p.167).

Heterogeneous cooperative teams would seem to provide a good environment for such discussions on consciousness-raising, enabling learners to compare and contrast each others’ preferred or habitual ways of learning and gain a deeper understanding of the processes in so doing. Thus, reflecting on and talking about learning is beneficial for learning. To complete the cycle, learners are given opportunities to experiment with different ways of using their memory, to gain new experiential data for reflection. For instance, to learn about vocabulary learning strategies, learners might be given various vocabulary lists in L2, which they learn using different types of mnemonic techniques.
Explanations of the rationale behind the different techniques will help them to understand why they work and to make personal choices depending on what seems to work best for them.

**III. 10. Pedagogic autonomy**

Such learning will result in what Wenden (1991) calls ‘pedagogic autonomy’, that is, acquisition of the skills and knowledge necessary to learn to manage one’s learning and learn on one’s own. Learners can become competent as learners of the new language, learning to deal with the learning task in rationale and informed ways. Learning about learning may, in fact, help to demystify the process involved and thus increase the learner’s feelings of confidence and competence. As O’Malley and Chamot (1990) point out, learners without metacognitive knowledge are essentially learners without direction and ability to review their progress.

Metacognitive knowledge refers to knowledge of one’s own cognitive processes and those of others. This knowledge bears some interesting and important characteristics for application to learning. Metacognitive knowledge is *stable*, thus it is retrievable for the use with learning tasks. It is *statable*; therefore it can be reflected upon and can be used as the topic of discussion with others. However, this type of knowledge may be *fallible*; so that what one believes about one’s cognitive processes may be
inaccurate, such as the belief that simple rote repetition is the key that underlies all learning. And finally, it appears *late in development*, since the ability of learners to step back from learning and reflect on their cognitive processes may require prior learning experiences as a point of reference (p.105).

That means, learners are not ‘blank slates’ that absorb the new language; they can learn in purposeful ways.

Autonomy, thus includes the notion of interdependence that is being responsible for one’s conduct in the social context: being able to cooperate with others and solve conflicts in constructive ways. Its development can be seen as an open-ended dimension involving personal, social and moral education. The task of education is to facilitate the development of the learner towards being a ‘fuller’ person with the capacity to reason, to feel and to act responsibly. The capacity to understand others and relate to them in meaningful ways is an integral part of personal growth (cf. Pring 1984:72-5). In the case of the intermediate learners of English, the curriculum aims instruction to slowly give way to construction of knowledge through social interaction and critical thinking. But in practice, intermediate learners fail to express their constructed knowledge in English. This paradox is one of the factors which probe into the possibilities of making the curricular aims a reality.
III.11. Psychological processes

Having discussed the different philosophical perspectives converging to learner autonomy, an overview of psychological theories of learning/ acquisition of language will be relevant to this study. The difference between ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ caused a number of disputes in modern linguistics. There are many theories as to how humans are able to develop language ability. According to Stephen Krashen’s (2003) acquisition-learning hypothesis, there are two independent ways in which we develop our linguistic skills: acquisition and learning. This theory has been the core of the framework of modern language acquisition, and is perhaps the most fundamental of Krashen’s theories on Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Acquisition of language is a subconscious process of which the individual is not aware. One is unaware of the process as it is happening and when the new knowledge is acquired, the acquirer generally does not realize that he or she possesses any new knowledge. According to Krashen, both adults and children can subconsciously acquire language, and either written or oral language can be acquired. This process is similar to the process that children undergo when learning their native language. Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language, during which the acquirer is focused on meaning rather than form. In modern linguistics, there are many theories as to how humans are able to develop language ability. Learning a language, on the other hand, is a conscious process, much like what one experiences in school. New knowledge or language forms are represented consciously in the learner’s mind, frequently in the form of language ‘rules’ and ‘grammar’ and the process often involves error correction. Language learning
involves formal instruction, and according to Krashen, is less effective than acquisition.

Arguments against this hypothesis have been elaborated towards the end of this chapter and in the coming chapters.

However, “[t]he study of language acquisition is an undertaking of great advantage but nobody to know what it is”, says company prospectus of the South Sea Bubble (quoted in Adam’s 1972:267) and that shows the difficulty to arrive at a consensus. For this reason in the last two decades language acquisition has been studied more intensively than ever before. The topic has always been attractive to psychologists who are concerned with child development, who intuitively believed that language was a significant pattern in human development and was related both to thought and cognition. Roger Brown (1973) suggests that it is the social, communicative function of language which has been most important since by means of language man can transmit and receive information, even from those long dead, thus enabling individual man to transcend the limits of his own experience. But Brown cannot agree to the belief that man’s linguistic powers are responsible for his cognitive powers: “Unfortunately we know next to nothing about what language has done for thought, and we can’t even be sure that language has importantly affected the power of thought” (1973:38). Labov, Skinner, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner and Chomsky are the radical thinkers in the line, each confuting, complimenting, and contributing towards the relationship between languages and thought (see Chapter.1).

What exactly do we mean when we say that a child acquires language?

Rather obviously, it means that a child learns to talk to his parents and to others;
but the real question is, what must the child have learned in order to be able to talk? Language is a rule governed series of signals related to events; in order to correctly generate such signals the speaker must have an implicit knowledge of grammar and the meanings coded by grammar. Likewise, the hearer must have a similar knowledge in order to decode the signals. Thus to develop a language is not to develop one linguistic aspect but several and then to coordinate them appropriately. First, a language is composed of sounds – it has a phonological system; these sounds when put together make words, which are joined into sentences-- that is a language has a syntactic system which governs how one sign is related to another sign, and it has a meaning or semantic system which regulates the relation between signs and their meanings. Thus, a child must learn the phonological, syntactic, and semantic rules and this learning process is the process of language acquisition.

A number of theories have been put forward in this regard and they can be broadly classified into four namely: behaviorist, structural, biological and theories of meaning.

Behaviorist theories are one of the earliest and perhaps the most obvious, namely that the child learns language in response to adult stimuli. This theory is associated with the behaviorists J B Watson and B F Skinner. Skinner(1959) asserted that since speech is a motor-response, the learning model which would
be the most appropriate is the ‘operant one’ – that is a random action is
rewarded and because of the reward it is repeated, and again rewarded, until the
originally random action becomes part of the person’s behavioral repertoire. In
the case of speech, the reinforcement is always social, and Skinner has several
suggestions as to how a speech response may arise. First, it may be learned as
an ‘echoic’ response, i.e., the child may imitate a sound it hears the parent
making and the parent will reward the imitation if it is sufficiently like the original
stimulus. Secondly, it may be learned as a ‘mant’, in this case the child utters a
random sound which causes the parent to respond and if this response happens
to fulfill a present need of the child then he will repeat the former randomly
produced sound. Thirdly, the verbal response may be acquired as ‘tact’, i.e. if a
child makes a certain sound when faced with a particular stimulus and is
rewarded for this, he will repeat the sound whenever the stimulus appears. A
learning theory of this kind stresses the non-linguistic situation in which the adult
acts either as a stimulus or as reinforcement. Words or group of words are
thought to be sorted into groups on the basis of the behavior with which they are
associated. E.g. the names of objects would be associated with manipulation by
the child or demonstration by an adult. Words of praise or blame which are used
to shape the child’s behavior would form another category.
Structural theorists saw language as an idealist system of symbols. Led first by Chomsky's (1959) linguistic theory they began to focus on word order or syntax as the basic structure of language. They were much more interested in the structure or the form of language than in its actual usage (function). Structuralists were psycho-linguists too. Instead of focusing on what children actually said, psycho-linguists focused on determining linguistic competence. They believed in nativism and the innateness of language. Recently, in his epoch making book, Steven Pinker (1994) supports Chomsky's innate theory of language by cleverly pointing out to the species specificity of languages used by homosapiens. To him using language is an instinct of human beings like making of webs by spiders and dams by beavers.

The internal structure of LAD is given by the linguistic universal, i.e. those linguistic features which are common to all languages. Chomsky argues that there is a universal hierarchy of word categories so that at the top we would have the category ‘all words’, then ‘nouns’ and ‘verbs’, then ‘types of noun’ etc. If a child had an innate knowledge of this he would be able, by working down it, to develop all the categories of adult grammar. McNeill (1970 a, b) maintains that all children have an innate concept of a sentence which gives rise to their initial hypothesis that a sentence consists of single words. As the child grows he
develops new particular hypotheses related to the nature of the particular
language to which he happens to have been exposed.

These theories of Chomsky, McNeill and others differ fundamentally from that
of Skinner in that they see the child’s unique early language as being initially
limited to the base or deep structure of sentence, springing from an innate
knowledge or awareness of the linguistic universals, and gradually developing
transformations so that the child becomes capable of converting the base
structure to surface structure. McNeill summarizes the essential difference by
saying:

If children begin their productive linguistic careers with a competence
limited to the base structure of sentences, it is difficult to see how it can
be explained by any theory of language acquisition that restricts attention
to what a child might obtain from the observable surface characteristics of
parental speech. Such theories would have to predict the opposite course
of development: first, surface structure; base structure. Most behaviorist
theories have assumed this order, with notable lack of success; failure is
inevitable when children produce only the base structure, and behaviorist
theories produce only the surface structure of sentences. What is needed
is either a child who commences acquisition with surface structure or a
theory that focuses on base structure. Since it is easier to change theories than children, the latter course has been followed here (1966 p.52).

Eric Lenneberg (1964 and 1967) was interested in the biological foundations of language. To say that something is biologically specific to our species may be to approach ‘the innate’ in a more constructive way. Steven Pinker (1994) also substantiates this theory of innateness as species-specific.

Language is not a cultural artifact that we learn in a way we learn to tell time or how the federal government works. Instead it is a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brains. Language is a complex specialized skill, which develops in the child spontaneously, without conscious effort or formal instruction, is deployed without awareness of its underlying logic, is qualitatively the same in every individual, and is distinct from more general abilities to process information or behave intelligently. For these reasons some cognitive scientists have described language as a psychological faculty, a mental organ, a neural system, and a computational module. But I prefer the admittedly quaint term “instinct”. It conveys the idea that people know how to talk in more or the sense that spiders know how to spin webs. Web-spinning was not invented by some unsung spider genius and does not depend on having had the right education or on having an aptitude for architecture or the construction
trades. Rather, spiders spin spider webs because they have spider brains, which give them the urge to spin and the competence to succeed. (p.18)

There are also interesting parallels between Lenneberg’s approach and that of Piaget’s, which is hardly surprising as both start from the very reasonable point that man is a particular type of biological organism. Biological theories considered three aspects: first, that language is species specific. Secondly, the relationship between language and cognitive functioning. And, thirdly, whether the development of language is biologically determined. Lenneberg gives five reasons for his arguments: first, language capacity is related to the way that the various parts of the human brain work together, in other words to its particular mode of functioning. Secondly the developmental schedule of language learning is the same for all humans, even those human those who are mentally retarded, the only difference being that the retardates may not progress as far as normals. Thirdly, it is very difficult to suppress language learning. Fourthly, he maintains that language cannot be taught to any other species. Lastly, he refers to the existence of language universals saying that we are capable of learning any language and human languages have more in common with each other than they have with any form of non-human communication. Lenneberg’s summary of the process of language acquisition is distinctive yet similar to Piaget’s:
If language is an aspect of a fundamental, biologically determined process, it is not scientifically profitable to look for a cause of language development in the growing child just as we do not look for a cause for the development of her ears. It might be more fruitful to think of maturation, including growth and the development of behavior such as language, as the traversing of highly unstable states. This disequilibrium, producing further rearrangements and so on until relative stability, known as maturity, is reached. Language readiness is an example of such a state of disequilibrium during which the mind creates a place into which the building blocks of language may fit (1967:376).

The theories based on meaning are interested in exploring what the child means when he speaks, in other words they seek answers to the question of his semantic intentions. Brown (1973), Bloom (1970) and others approached language acquisition by studying the child’s semantic development by asking how and why the child learns meaning central and moves the investigation closer to a socio-linguistic approach since semantic sentential relation such as ‘agent’, ‘patient’, and ‘instrument’ can only develop when the child has been exposed to a social situation in which they are relevant.
Halliday (1973) suggests that language acquisition should be seen as the development of the ‘function’ or ‘use’ of language in such a way that each of these functions has an associated ‘meaning potential’. His hypothesis is that in the first phase of development the basic functions of language are acquired. In the second phase, the child develops in the use of vocabulary, functional structures and dialogue. In the third phase the child approaches adult language in that each of his utterances is no longer representative of a single use of language but is beginning to mark the adult functional distinction between ‘ideational’ and ‘interpersonal’. Halliday characterizes the first as the ‘observer’ function of language and the second as the ‘intruder’ function of language. This means that, in learning language the child is also learning the constituents of social world in which he finds himself through the interactive linguistic process whereby he is both able to assign and accept roles, and to observe and play a part in the world.

III. 12. Language, thought and cognition

The relationship between language and thought, which was categorically referred to in Chapter1, has generated a great deal of speculation and research along with the theories of meaning. Over the years, a number of ideas have been presented which are widespread and have received scholarly support. One
of these ideas is that thought comes from speech. Accordingly, thought is not something different from speech, but is actually a kind of speech that is not spoken aloud. It is speech that controls what and how we think; thought does not control what we say. Typically, it is behaviorists who have expressed this view.

The founder of Behaviorism, John B Watson, said in 1924, for example, that thought is nothing but talking to ourselves and that this talking to ourselves originates from speaking aloud. Following Watson, the linguist Bloomfield and the philosopher Ryle proposed similar views on both the origin of thought and nature of thought. For Bloomfield, thinking was a system of movements that had been reduced from actual speech to the point where they were no longer visible. For Ryle, much ordinary thinking was an internal monologue where, in order for us to talk to ourselves (to think), “We should have previously learned to talk intelligently aloud and have heard and understood other people doing so.” The psychologist Skinner, too, emphasized that thought is not some mysterious process which is responsible for behavior, but the very behavior itself. In the sixties, Vygotsky’s position had great appeal. He argued that thought and speech had different roles, but that their development, although separate, was not mutually exclusive-- at times the two developmental processes came together but they always divulged again. Thus, he says, there is a ‘pre-
intellectual’ stage in speech, and a ‘pre-linguistic’ stage in thought, but thought and speech do come together and at this point thought becomes verbal and speech rational. From this he develops his theory of word meaning:

The meaning of a word represents such a close of amalgam of thought and language that it is hard to tell whether it is a phenomenon of speech or a phenomenon of thought. A word without meaning is an empty sound; meaning, therefore, is a criterion of ‘word’, in indispensable component. It would seem, then, that it may be regarded as a phenomenon of speech. But from the point of view of psychology, the meaning of every word is a generalization or a concept. And since generalizations and concepts are undeniably acts of thought, we may regard meaning as a phenomenon of thinking. It does not follow, however, that meaning formally belongs to two different spheres of psychic life. Word meaning is a phenomenon of thought only in so far as thought is embodied in speech, and of speech only in so far as speech is connected with thought and illumined by it. It is a phenomenon of verbal thought, or meaningful speech – a union of word and thought. (1962:120)

Piaget’s theory is somewhat different. To Piaget thinking is a result of operational intelligence which does not begin to develop until the age of seven,
then the appearance of language, precedes the appearance of thought by several years.

This has two implications: first, the ability of language to facilitate thinking contrary to what is often assumed is greatest after the appearance of operational thinking and especially during the stage of formal operations. Secondly, in the earlier stages, language, since it is symbolic system, is less important as an aid to intelligence than is often thought. It is true that language will aid learning, as defined above, but it shows the limitations characteristic of all symbols, which is that since a symbol stands in place of the object it symbolizes, then it can only be interpreted if one already knows the object. Therefore symbols do not add anything new to an individual's knowledge, they merely enable him to formulate what he already knows in a different way. To be able to use a symbolic form of expression, e.g. saying 'I want my doll', instead of being limited to the action of pointing, is the result of the development of the schemes which end the sensory-motor stage, not the cause of their development. However, since language, by its very nature, enables a person to transcend the here and now, it is particularly appropriate as a vehicle for formal thought, which, again by its very nature, is concerned with possible rather than actual worlds and with the hypothetical rather than the verified. Piaget lays before us a theory based on biological functioning which stresses that cognitive development is the result of the
organisms’ active adaptation to the environment through accommodation and assimilation. As a result of this, the variant cognitive structures develop, which are themselves coordinated schemes, and which in turn, combine to form intelligence. Intelligence, at the operational level, is thinking, and both intelligence and thinking have to be distinguished from learning. Thus Piaget made a start and it is for others to extend his insights when they, in their turn, continue thinking about thinking.

Many people believe that the language system, with its grammatical rules and vocabulary, forms thought or is necessary for thought and that a particular language imposes particular ideas of nature or of one’s culture but the case of Helen Keller, who became deaf and blind due to a disease at the age of 18 months, is relevant and interesting in this regard. After her illness, she was not exposed again to language until she was 8 years old. In her autobiography she talks of her teachers ‘despair’ and her own ‘repentance’ and ‘sorrow’ when she had behaved badly. These were experiences for which she had no words at that time but for which she had concepts. If she could not think, she would not have been able to remember details of her past mental stage. Her memories of her past, before she had the language with which to express them, were more than just a sequence of feelings and emotions. Keller had thoughts and ideas which
she had organized into a complex conceptual framework. Clearly, such a mental
construction as this did not require language for its establishment.

Jerome Bruner concerned himself primarily with the process of perception
and cognition while maintaining an active interest in education, culture and
human ontogeny. In those early years of cognitive revolution, he viewed
language as a window of cognition – perhaps as a tool of cognition – not as an
interesting cognitive and cultural phenomenon in its own right. Then, his studies
of language acquisition during his decade at Oxford opened up for
developmental psychologists an entirely new dimension in the study of how
children understand the minds of their communicative partners and the cultural
context within which communication takes place, which in turn paved the way for
studies of children’s theories of minds and the role of culture in shaping them. In
his remarkable paper (1972) entitled, *The Nature and Uses of Immaturity*, Bruner
tackles language specifically in a section entitled, ‘Using Symbolic Means:
Language’. Here he introduces the two central complimentary topics: how
children are able to learn the linguistic conventions of their culture; and, second,
the role of language and other cultural conventions in introducing children to
particular ways of thinking, acting and interacting. Regarding the first topic, he
introduces two key notions – communicating function of language and the role of
language introducing children to particular ways of thinking, acting and
interacting in conformity with the cultural conventions. In other words, children learn to communicate linguistically in the context of coordinated activities with mature language uses, and their talk is structured by their non-linguistic cognition of actions, objects and properties.

Bruner turns to the second point, i.e., the influence of language on developing children:

(But) with further growth, the major trend is a steadfast march away from the use of language as an adjunct of action....(Language) frees the attention of the use from his immediate surroundings, directing attention to what is being said rather than to what is being done or seen. In the process, language becomes a powerful instrument in selectively directing attention to feature of the environment represented by it.... Increasingly then, language in its decontextualized form becomes among human beings the medium for passing on knowledge. (1972: 700-702)

Parallel to the cognitive theory of Bruner and the behavioral theory of Skinner, we come across the revolutionary theory of Noam Chomsky. Chomsky (1968b) proposed that human beings are innately endowed with a Universal Grammar (UG) and a Language Acquisition Device (LAD). In opposition, Bruner posited that human beings come into a world that is already structured culturally
and linguistically, and their long period of immaturity is designed precisely for them to acquire the particular cultural and linguistic conventions into which they are born. Thus, in all cultures, adults and children engage in routine interactions involving nursing and eating, bathing and sleeping, dressing and undressing, and other activities, in which adults address them with at least some language. This may be called the language acquisition support system (LASS). Human children are not innately equipped with a universal grammar applicable to all of the languages of the world equally (Tomasello, 1995b). They are adapted to enter into joint attentional interactions with adults and to understand adult intentions and attentions, and eventually to adopt adult roles in these interactions, including their use of particular linguistic conventions. Again according to Chomsky, a young child is able to gain perfect mastery of a language with incomparably greater ease than an adult and mere exposure to the language, for a remarkably short period seems to be all that a child needs to develop the competence of the native speaker. Chomsky argues that children’s acquisition of a well-formed grammar of the language, despite their being exposed to inadequate language data, and is evidence of the assistance of innate language ideas. The language data, Chomsky (1967, p.6) insists, are ‘meager in scope’, and ‘degenerate remarkable accomplishments in acquiring the grammar’, could not have been through the lengthy accumulation of
language learning that the child would have had to experience. If one were postulating an empiricist-based acquisition process, then Chomsky argues this could only have occurred with the assistance of the innate language faculty (also called Universal Grammar). It is through the help of innate language ideas that the acquisition of language is made so easy and rapid. The empiricist cannot account for such ease and speed of acquisition.

Putnam (1967) has countered Chomsky’s arguments by comparing the number of hours spent by a child in learning a language with that of an adult learning a language. He contends that a child of four or five years who has learned the essential of the language spends much more time in the process than would an adult, and that this time is not a short time at all. That being the case, there is no need to create something special to assist the child in language learning. Language acquisition can be accounted for by step-by-step learning along the empiricist line. There is no need to posit the existence of innate language ideas, maintains Putnam. Empirical researches by Labov, Newport and others have convincingly demonstrated that, as Labov neatly phrases it: “The ungrammaticality of everyday speech appears to be a myth with no basis in actual fact. In the various empirical studies, which we have conducted . . . the proportion of truly ungrammatical and ill formed sentences falls to less than 2 per cent” (1970, p.42)
There was a counter argument from Chomsky challenging the importance of the 2 per cent in scientific data (Chomsky 1975 fn.6). Another argument of Chomsky holds that language acquisition is essentially independent of intelligence. In support of this thesis he argues that grammar is so peculiar, so different from any other kind of knowledge that it cannot be any function of rational, operating intelligence. It is because animals are born only with intelligence and not with innate language ideas that they cannot learn language to any significant degree. An animal that is otherwise intelligent in so many realms of life is unable to learn more than the simplest of language structures. This is an evidence for universal grammar in humans, a species-specific innate language structure that does not appear in animals. Chomsky has also argued that, concerning humans “… vast difference in intelligence have only a small effect on resulting competence (knowledge of a particular grammar)” (1967, p.3). By this he implies that if intelligence is relevant to language acquisition, then more intelligent people should acquire a greater competence. But, more intelligent persons do not acquire a greater competence than do less intelligent persons, he says. That being the case, he then concludes that different degrees of intelligence do not affect language acquisition, and, intelligence itself is irrelevant to the acquisition of language. Since the uniformity of competence regarding all linguistic essentials observed among speakers of a language is not
due to intelligence, it must be due to something else. That something else must be universal grammar, according to Chomsky.

Thus, after due consideration, the most plausible version of the relationship between language and thought is that the thought system in the mind has its origins in sources that are distinct from language. Only when thought is sufficiently developed through the child’s experience of objects, events and situations in the world, can language begin to be learned. Then over a period of time the complete language system is formed but through this medium of thought. The philosopher, John Locke, some centuries ago proposed precisely this view: that the relationship between language and thought is such that thought is independent of language, with language deriving from thought. Given such a relationship, language can thereby fulfill its primary role, which is as an instrument for the expression or communication for thought.

III. 13. The Indian situation

In India, in the case of second language acquisition, National Curriculum Framework (NCF)- 2005 states:

English in India is a global language in a multilingual country . . . the level of introduction of English is now a matter of political response to people’s aspirations rather than an academic or feasibility issue, and people’s
choices about the level of its introduction in the curricula will have to be respected with a proviso that we do not extend downwards the very system that has failed to deliver. The goals for a second language curriculum are twofold: attainment of basic proficiency, such as is acquired in natural language learning, and the development of the language into an instrument philosophy (incorporating Vigotskyian, Choamskian and Piagetian principles). (2005: pp. 38 to 39)

This is applicable in the case of India and with many other countries, where English occupies the status of a second language, especially in the present context of globalization. Over the last two decades, researchers interested in investigating the linguistic competence of second language learners have drawn heavily on current generative grammarian’s order to understand the nature of mental representation, or inter language grammar, attained by L 2 learners. The enriched relationship between linguistic theory and L2 acquisition theory can largely be attributed to the introduction of the Principles and Parameters Framework (Chomsky 1981). This framework accommodated variation between languages by introducing the concept of parameters; in addition, proposals for universal principles became much more highly developed than they had been in earlier versions of generative grammar. The emphasis on parameters allowed L2 researchers to look at variation between languages and the role of language
transfer, investigating whether or not parameters of universal grammar can be (reset) in L2 acquisition.

On the part of teachers they want to know which view of the learning process is the most appropriate for second language teaching, as there are many strong points of disagreement between one school of thought and another, the teacher is in a dilemma to choose between the different views of the second language acquisition theories. Classic examples of such a concept of theories for second language acquisition process are the ones proposed by Krashen (1981) and McLaughlin (1978) which we discussed earlier in this chapter and Chapter1. In relatively non-technical terms, we can say that Krashen claims that the key aspect of second language acquisition is an unconscious process resulting from experience in using the language and that this process is not directly benefitted by the conscious learning of the grammatical rules. The explicit learning of rules during classroom instruction, he argues, only provides a means of ‘monitoring’ output and does not easily convert into ‘acquired’, or automatic, language ability. In contrast, McLaughlin argues that learning in a conscious way in a classroom setting should not be treated as a peripheral aspect of language acquisition and that learned aspect of the second language can become an automatic process in the use of the language. With these opposing views, language teachers face a dilemma in trying to decide how to organize lessons.
John Shumann (1983) argues that Krashen and McLoughlin may actually be basing their arguments on their personal, and quite different language learning experiences. If, as a learner, your experience has been one in which you believe that formal grammatical instruction has enabled you to become a relatively proficient user of the second language, and then you tend to agree with McLaughleen and feel that Krashen was requiring you to deny your own experience. If you have become proficient via use of the second language in a situation where there was little or no formal grammatical instruction, then you would feel that your experience has been accurately captured by Krashen’s proposal. From this perspective, both Krashen and McLoughlin are right, says Shumann: “Neither position is correct; they are simply alternate representations of reality” (p.55).

Nevertheless, there are disadvantages associated with both approaches.

Krashen points out that a learner who is concerned with producing grammatically correct language may be hesitant, lack fluency, and generally sacrificing communicative effectiveness in using the language in order to try to achieve formal accuracy. If this is the case that the interactive use of the language does, it does not contribute to the development of greater proficiency, then the formal learning experience may have a negative effect on the learner’s
long term development of language proficiency. This has to be considered a serious problem, and one which many language teachers will recognize from their experience with some students who can provide grammatical description of English relative clauses and who can easily perform sentence combination exercises in the classroom to create relative clauses yet whose poor spoken English performance does not seem to put these skills into practice.

In L1 acquisition the learner’s task is to acquire a grammar on the basis of input, a grammar which constitutes a mental representation of the language being acquired, and which is involved in the comprehension and production of language. In a sense, one can think of L2 acquisition research as starting from where L1 acquisition research ends. Current research focuses particularly on the nature of the linguistic knowledge available at the commencement of L2 acquisition, including consideration of the extent to which the L2 learner is influenced by the L1 grammar whether the L1 grammar is adopted as the L2 learners’ initial theory of the L2 and if so, whether all or only parts of the L1 grammar are adopted.

From another angle, the L2 acquisition process should be adopted as most suitable for meeting the needs of the students. Needs being identified, how to select the methodology and materials is the second question, e.g. should they
choose to follow a model of inductive learning, providing lots of examples, plenty of practice, and a minimum of explanation? Or should they start with a clear explanation, followed by a few examples and the practice formats associated with deductive learning models? Should they try to follow the example of some older and very experienced language teacher who insists that despite all the criticism, Audio-lingual methodology is still the most effective? These questions are, in a sense, unanswerable ones if no information is available on who the learners are, what they know, and what they have experienced already, and what they might need to know. So, needs analysis is one of the important steps to be considered before formulating different means to facilitate learning and teaching ESL. This research, therefore, includes ‘needs analyses’ in this chapter to find out what is to be done to the individual learner in making him autonomous.

Having discussed very briefly, the theories and thoughts influencing language learning/ acquisition (including ESL acquisition in general) and the relationship between language and thought, a little more reflection on cognitive theories supporting learner autonomy and the styles and the strategies that lead toward autonomy seems to be imperative here. In Chapter I, the views of Skinner and Piaget on cognition has been mentioned with very little explanation. Now, what
the ‘revolutionaries’ in this field say can be listened to and the pedagogical
implications of their theories too.

**III. 14. Theoretical implications in pedagogy**

As we know, Jerome Bruner was an ideal focus in his role in two crucial
paradigm shifts in the 20th century psychology (Chapter I). In the 1950’s, along
with Chomsky, Bruner was an instrumental figure in the cognitive revolution
which restored to psychology the inner life of the mind after decades of arid
behaviorist objectivism. Then as cognitive psychology prospered and evolved
into ‘cognitive signs, conceived as a systematic interdisciplinary approach to the
study of mind’, Bruner gradually grew more and more dissatisfied with what
cognitivism had become. In 1990 he published *Acts of Meaning* in which he
argued that cognitive revolution had betrayed the impulse that had brought it into
being. Because cognitivism had become so enamored of computational models
of the mind that it had replaced behaviorisms impoverished view of the person
with one no better: human beings as information processors. In response,
Bruner argued forcefully that meaning is not a given, but something made by
human beings as they negotiate the world. Meaning is cultural, not
computational, nor phenomenal. And since meaning is a medium of the mental,
culture is a constitutive of the mind. In saving the cognitive revolution from
itself, distancing it form hi-tech reductionism (brain is hardware, mind is software, and thinking is the software processing information on the hardware etc.), Bruner has raised, over the past few decades or so yet another banner heralding yet another dispensation: ‘cultural psychology’.

What now comes to the centre of attention is the individual's engagement with the established systems of shared meaning, with the beliefs, the values, and the understandings of those already in place in society as he or she is thrown in amongst them. For Bruner, the critical 'test frame' for this point of view is education -- the field of practices within which such engagement is, in the first instance, effected. Rather than a psychology that sees the mind as a programmable mechanism, we need one that sees it as a social achievement. Education is not simply a technical business of well-managed information processing, nor even simply a matter of applying 'learning theories' to the classroom or using the results of subject-centered 'achievement testing'. It is a complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture (Bruner, 1996: 43).

For Bruner, the critical enabling factor, the thing that brings the mind to focus, is culture - 'the way of life and thought that we construct, negotiate, institutionalize, and finally (after it is all settled) end up calling "reality" to comfort
ourselves' (1996: 87). Any theory of education that hopes to reform it, and there hardly is any other kind, needs to train its attention on the social production of meaning. The terms upon which society and child -- the 'reality' already there and the scuttling intellect thrust bodily into it -- engage one another are in good part worked out in the classroom, or at least they are in our school-conscious society. It is there that mentality is most deliberately fashioned, subjectivity most systematically produced, and intersubjectivity - the ability to 'read other minds' - most carefully nurtured. In the favorable case, not perhaps entirely common, the child, 'seen as an epistemologist as well as a learner', moves into an ongoing community of discoursing adults and chattering children where 'she ... gradually comes to appreciate that she is acting not directly on "the world" but on beliefs she holds about that world' (1996: 57, 49).

This turn towards concern with the ways in which the understandings abroad in the larger society are used by the schoolchild to find her feet, to build up an inner sense of who she is, what others are up to, what is likely to happen, what can be done about things, opens Bruner's 'cultural psychology' to a host of issues normally addressed by other disciplines --history, literature, law, philosophy, linguistics, and, anthropology. Such a psychology, rather like anthropology, has an eclectic perspective and a vast ambition built directly into it. It seems to take all experience for its object, to draw on all scholarship for its
means. With so many doors to open, and so many keys with which to open them, it would be folly to try to open all of them at once -- that way lies knowing less and less about more and more. Sensitive as always to the practicalities of research, the door Bruner wants to open (not altogether surprisingly, given recent developments in discourse theory, speech-act analysis, the interpretation of cultures, and the hermeneutics of everyday life) is narrative.

Telling stories, about ourselves and about others, to ourselves and to others, is the most natural and the earliest way in which we organize our experience and our knowledge' (Bruner, 1996:121). But you would hardly know it from standard educational theory, trained as it is upon tests and recipes:

It has been the convention of most schools to treat the art of narrative - song, drama, fiction, theater, whatever - as more 'decoration' than necessity, as something with which to grace leisure, sometimes even as something morally exemplary. Despite that, we frame the accounts of our cultural origins and our most cherished beliefs in story form, and it is not just the 'content' of these stories that grip us, but their narrative artifice. Our immediate experience, what happened yesterday or the day before, is framed in the same storied way. Even more striking, we represent our lives (to ourselves as well as to others) in the form of narrative. It is not
surprising that psychoanalysts now recognize that personhood implicates narrative, 'neurosis' being a reflection of either an insufficient, incomplete, or inappropriate story about oneself. Recall that when Peter Pan asks Wendy to return to Never Land with him, he gives as his reason that she could teach the Lost Boys there how to tell stories. If they knew how to tell them, the Lost Boys might be able to grow up. (Bruner, 1996: 40)

Growing up among narratives -- one's own, those of teachers, schoolmates, parents, janitors, and various other sorts of what Saul Bellow once mordantly referred to as 'reality instructors' -- is the essential scene of education. 'We live in a sea of stories', as Bruner puts it (1996:147). Learning how to swim in such a sea, how to construct, understand, classify, check out, see through and use stories *to find out how things work or what they come to, is what the school, and beyond the school the whole 'culture of education', is, at base, all about. The heart of the matter, what the learner learns whatever the teacher teaches, is 'that human beings make sense of the world by telling stories about it - by using the narrative mode for construing reality' (Bruner, 1996: l30). Tales are tools, 'instruments of mind on behalf of meaning making' (1996: 41).

Later in the 1990s, assorted versions of constructionist and discursive psychology have appeared on the scene, joining a veritable chorus of diverse voices urging that psychology treat the mind as a socio-cultural phenomenon
supporting the arguments of both Bruner and Vygotsky (Cultural Psychology and Social Constructivism).

III. 15. Social constructivism

   It will be sensible to discuss the (social) constructivist views on learning, learner, teaching, teacher and the classroom dynamics and to examine how it supports learner autonomy.

   Social constructivism views each learner as a unique individual with unique needs and backgrounds. The learner is also seen as complex and multidimensional. Social constructivism not only acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of the learner, but actually encourages, utilizes and rewards it as an integral part of the learning process (Wertsch 1997).

   Examining the importance of the social background and culture of each learner, we come to realize that social constructivism encourages the learner to arrive at his or her own version of the truth, influenced by his or her background, culture or embedded worldview. Without the social interaction with other more knowledgeable people, it is impossible to acquire social meaning of important symbol systems and learn how to utilize them. Young children develop their thinking abilities by interacting with other children, adults and the physical world. From the social constructivist viewpoint, it is thus important to take into account the background and culture of the learner throughout the learning process, as
this background also helps to shape the knowledge and truth that the learner creates, discovers and attains in the learning process (Wertsch 1997).

Autonomous learning, as envisaged by this study, takes into account the social background and culture of each learner.

Furthermore, it is argued that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner (Von Glasersfeld 1989), which is one of the key principles of learner autonomy. Social constructivism thus emphasizes the importance of the learner being actively involved in the learning process, unlike previous educational viewpoints where the responsibility rested with the instructor to teach and where the learner played a passive, receptive role. Von Glasersfeld (1989) emphasizes that learner's construct their own understanding and that they do not simply mirror and reflect what they read. Learners look for meaning and will try to find regularity and order in the events of the world even in the absence of full or complete information.

Another crucial assumption regarding the nature of the learner concerns the level and source of motivation for learning. According to Von Glasersfeld (1989) sustaining motivation to learn is strongly dependent on the learner’s confidence in his or her potential for learning. These feelings of competence and belief in potential to solve new problems are derived from first-hand experience of mastery of problems in the past and are much more powerful than any external
acknowledgment and motivation (Prawat and Floden 1994). This links up with Vygotsky’s "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky 1978) where learners are challenged within close proximity to, yet slightly above, their current level of development. By experiencing the successful completion of challenging tasks, learners gain confidence and motivation to embark on more complex challenges.

According to the social constructivist approach, instructors have to adapt to the role of facilitators and not teachers. Where a teacher gives a didactic lecture which covers the subject matter, a facilitator helps the learner to get to his or her own understanding of the content. In the former scenario the learner plays a passive role and in the latter scenario the learner plays an active role in the learning process. The emphasis thus turns away from the instructor and the content, and towards the learner. This dramatic change of role implies that a facilitator needs to display a totally different set of skills than a teacher. A teacher tells, a facilitator asks; a teacher lectures from the front, a facilitator supports from the back; a teacher gives answers according to a set curriculum, a facilitator provides guidelines and creates the environment for the learner to arrive at his or her own conclusions; a teacher mostly gives a monologue, a facilitator is in continuous dialogue with the learners. A facilitator should also be able to adapt the learning experience ‘in mid-air’ by using his or her own initiative in order to steer the learning experience to where the learners want to create
value. But, many people hold the belief that a facilitator’s role will be less responsible than that of the teacher.

The learning environment should also be designed to support and challenge the learner’s thinking. While it is advocated to give the learner ownership of the problem and solution process, it is not the case that any activity or any solution is adequate. The critical goal is to support the learner in becoming an effective thinker and to promote the latent creativity in each individual. This can be achieved by assuming multiple roles, such as consultant and coach, critic and philosopher.

A further characteristic of the role of the facilitator in the social constructivist viewpoint is that the instructor and the learners are equally involved in learning from each other as well. This means that the learning experience is both subjective and objective and requires that the instructor’s culture, values and background become an essential part of the interplay between learners and tasks in the shaping of meaning. Learners compare their version of the truth with that of the instructor and fellow learners in order to get to a new, socially tested version of truth. The task or problem is thus the interface between the instructor and the learner (McMahon 1997). This creates a dynamic interaction between task, instructor and learner. This entails that learners and instructors should develop an awareness of each other’s viewpoints and then look to own beliefs,
standards and values, thus being both subjective and objective at the same time (Savery 1994).

Some studies argue for the importance of mentoring in the process of learning (Archee and Duin 1995; Brown et al. 1989). The social constructivist model thus emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the student and the instructor in the learning process.

Some learning approaches that could harbor this interactive learning include reciprocal teaching, peer collaboration, cognitive apprenticeship, problem-based instruction, web quests, anchored instruction and other approaches that involve learning with others.

Social constructivist scholars thus view learning as an active social process where learners should learn to discover principles, concepts and facts for themselves, hence the importance of encouraging guesswork and intuitive thinking in learners (Brown et al. 1989). In fact, for the social constructivist, reality is not something that we can discover because it does not pre-exist prior to our social invention of it. Kukla (2000) argues that reality is constructed by our own activities and that people, together as members of a society, invent the properties of the world. Other constructivist scholars agree with this and emphasize that individuals make meanings through the interactions with each other and with the environment they live in. Knowledge is thus a product of
humans and is socially and culturally constructed. McMahon (1997) agrees that learning is a social process. He further states that learning is not a process that only takes place inside our minds, nor is it a passive development of our behaviors that is shaped by external forces and that meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities.

Vygotsky (1978) also highlighted the convergence of the social and practical elements in learning by saying that the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge. Through practical activity a child constructs meaning on an intrapersonal level, while speech connects this meaning with the interpersonal world shared by the child and her/his culture.

Most social constructivist models, such as that proposed by Duffy and Jonassen (1992), also stress the need for collaboration among learners, in direct contradiction to traditional competitive approaches. One Vygotskian notion that has significant implications for peer collaboration is that of the ‘zone of proximal development’. Defined as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers, it differs from the fixed biological nature
of Piaget's stages of development. Through a process of 'scaffolding' a learner can be extended beyond the limitations of physical maturation to the extent that the development process lags behind the learning process (Vygotsky 1978). (In this chapter, the theoretical support for collaborative learning has already been examined.)

Nevertheless, in actual practice, in the State, there are certain misconceptions and myths that have evolved concerning constructivist instructional practices. They stem primarily from misinterpretations of the underlying principles of learning posited by constructivism. Constructivism posits that learners construct their own reality based upon their individual perceptions of prior experiences. Thus, each person’s knowledge is a function of his or her prior experiences, how they are perceived and how they are organized. Once organized into complex mental structures, we use our cognitive frameworks to interpret objects, ideas, relationships, or phenomena. Thus, what a person knows is grounded in one’s unique perception of his or her physical and social experiences; and we use our varied mental capabilities to explain, predict, or make inferences about phenomena in the real world.

These assumptions about how learners learn give rise, in turn, to important practical questions about constructivism applied to teaching. Specifically, if
learners must each construct a unique reality, one that resides in the mind of the learner, then:

a) How can teachers create a purposeful/focused learning environment?
b) How can teachers determine and ensure a common set of learning outcomes for students?
c) How can teachers plan a set of instructional events or conditions when there is such unpredictability about what learning will be acquired?

Erroneous answers to these questions based on fundamental misconceptions have resulted in a few detrimental myths about constructivist instruction. With this researcher's long experience as an ESL teacher, it has been tried to clarify the doubts in the conclusion.

(Please see Chapter V).

III. 16. Learner needs

In an era of shrinking resources, there are growing demands for accountability in public life, with education a particularly urgent case and foreign language education a prime example within it. Many secondary school students and, especially, adults with serious academic, occupational, vocational, or 'survival' needs for functional L2 proficiency, as well as their sponsors, are increasingly dissatisfied with lessons, materials and methodology developed for
someone else or for no-one in particular. There is an urgent need for courses of all kinds to be made relevant – and to be seen to be relevant - to the needs of specific groups of learners and of society at large. This is especially, but not only, true of advanced courses which by definition (should) involve specialized instruction for specific purposes. General (language for no specific purpose or for special target audience) courses at any proficiency level almost always teach too much, e.g., vocabulary, skills, registers or styles some learners do not need, and too little, e.g., omitting lexis and genres that they do. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, it is more defensible to view every course as involving specific purposes, the difference in each case being simply the precision with which it is possible to identify current or future uses of the L2. This varies from little or no precision in the case of most young children, to great precision in that of most adult learners. The intermediate level is an entry to adulthood and, therefore the needs analysis is more precise than the other level school children.

Since the 1960s, considerable attention has been paid to the development of procedures capable of generating language learning programs responsive to learners’ objective needs. Thus, even if some of these procedures have tended to be somewhat external and insufficiently open to learners’ own knowledge and insights, the language teaching profession had at its disposal a valuable array of analytical tools which it can use to explore learners’ objective needs.
Furthermore, there is a wide spread acceptance of the importance of gearing learning programs around learners’ objective needs. The situation with respect to subjective learning needs is not so advanced, neither in terms of our understanding of the phenomena involved, nor with respect to our ability to accommodate these phenomena in course design. Brindley (1984) explains the relative neglect of subjective needs in the development of CLT in the following terms:

In the early stages of the communicative movement in language teaching, objective needs received a great deal of emphasis, since language was seen primarily as a means to an end.... Subjective needs... were thought to be unpredictable, therefore indefinable. Language teachers were thus able to wash their hands off the extremely difficult business of taking affective variables into account... (pp.31-2).

In autonomous learning, subjective needs have equal or more importance when compared with objective needs. A number of trends have contributed to our current awareness of the role played by learners’ subjective needs. Humanistic language teaching and learning strategy research are a few which played a very significant role on learner training and learner autonomy. Research into subjective needs in L2 teaching would seem to be faced with two main sets of priorities. The first relates to the establishment of a generally accepted
categorization of the various factors which may be considered as constitutive of learners’ subjective needs. The second is more directly pedagogical in nature, and involves the exploration of the ways in which subjective needs can best be accommodated in terms both of methodology and course design.

Brindley’s brief definition gives an indication of the difficulties involved in pinning down and dealing systematically with subjective needs. For Brindley, subjective needs are:

…the cognitive and affective needs of the learner in the learning situation, [and can be identified] from information about affective and cognitive factors such as personality, confidence, attitudes, learners’ wants and expectations with regard to the learning of [the TL] and their individual cognitive style and learning strategies (1989: 70).

III. 17. Learning styles

However, exploring the role of subjective needs in language learning should not be seen as having to produce a neat, flow-chart based set of procedures. It has far more to do with the recognition and respect of human difference and the attempt to work with this diversity is in a flexible and constructive manner that means, when we think of subjective needs, two other related terms are to be considered: individual differences and learning styles. Individual differences will be taken to be those psychological or cognitive continua along which learners
differ from one another, and which may have a bearing on their interaction with their language study. Learning style is seen as the combined result of variance on the range of psychological and cognitive factors falling under the heading of individual differences insofar as they influence learners’ preferences for different study modes and activity types: learning style will thus be taken to be the tangible manifestation of individual differences.

Ian Tudor (1996) examines a number of individual differences which are likely to exert an influence on the way in which learners react to aspects of their languages study, and which can shape their preferences with respect to the nature and organization of learning activities. These variables are, he says, two main types: psychosocial and cognitive. The former relates to learners' psychological and affective reactions to the interpersonal aspects of language study; the latter relates to the way in which learners organize their experience of the world (of language and of language learning) and how they prefer to learn. The psychosocial variables are introversion-extroversion, anxiety, self esteem, and risk taking. The cognitive factor, by definition is the cognitive style. Tolerance of ambiguity can be included both in psychosocial and cognitive. We are still uncertain of the nature of the profession’s understanding of the whole area of individual differences. Our profession is involved in the process of developing the conceptual and terminological tools which will enable it to get to
grips with the area of individual differences in a coherent manner. The individual differences are all likely to influence the way in which learners interact with the process of language study, which is known as learning style. However, it would be unproductive to construct a pedagogical approach wholly around any one of these differences, even if each may play its role and needs therefore be born in mind. It is essentially for this reason that researchers have endeavored to find a single tool for getting to grips with learners' psychosocial and cognitive involvement in their language study. It is with this goal in mind that the construct of learning style has been developed. Oxford and Ehrman(1993) cite two useful definitions of this construct:

Learning style consists of distinct behaviors which serve as indicators of how a person learns from and interacts with his environment. (Gregoire 1979: 234 sited in Oxford and Ehrman, op. cit.: 196)

Essentially, learning style can be defined as a consistent pattern of behavior but with a certain range of individual variability… . Styles then are overall patterns that give general direction to learning behavior.

(Cornett 1983: 9 cited in Oxford and Ehrman, op. cit.: 196)

For Willing (1988), learning style is:

... a notion of inherent, pervasive sets of characteristics which group people into types or place an individual at a particular point along a
descriptive scale... Learning style is [more concrete than cognitive style],
in that it looks directly at the totality of psychological functioning as this
affects learning (p.52).

Learning style is thus a very powerful concept which incorporates a wide
range of both psycho-social and cognitive variables and seeks to encapsulate
the way in which these are translated into concrete learning behaviors and
preferences. In addition to these two sets of variables, learning style would also
seem to include a sensory preference variable: visual, auditory and hands-on
(Oxford and Ehrman 1993: 196-7). Visual learners prefer to read to obtain
information by means of visual stimulus provided by film, posters, charts, etc.;
such learners may find lectures, discussions or oral directions without any visual
back up to be difficult to follow or anxiety-producing. Auditory learners, by
contrast, can do without visual support quiet easily, and therefore tend to enjoy
lectures and conversations; they react well to class activities such as role play or
discussion, but may experience difficulties with written work. Hands-on learners
as the term implies, enjoy a lot of movement and activity within their learning
environment, and they react well to working with tangible objects; perhaps not
surprisingly, such learners may react negatively to long periods behind a desk
and may seem dependent on a lot variety and direct stimulus.
The combination of these three sets of variables (i.e. an individual’s psychosocial, cognitive and sensory characteristics) goes to reduce a set of preferred modes of behavior which may be described as the individual learning style. Learning style is therefore a practically-oriented construct: it is based less on a relational or causative analysis of the way in which an individual’s psychosocial, cognitive or sensory characteristics reduce a given set of behaviors, but rather on the analysis and grouping of observed behavioral preferences. The main goal of research into learning style is to help teachers to get to grips with their students’ learning behaviors around a finite number of poles of difference, and thereby to be better able to respond to learners’ subjective needs in an informed manner. It also, of course, seeks to generalize among both teachers and learners a fuller understanding of what language learning is, and can be.

III. 18. Needs analysis: Strategies and tools

So far we have discussed the needs of the learners as subjective needs and objective needs taking into consideration the individual differences and learning styles. Now we have to go deeper into the analysis of these needs. The term ‘needs analysis’, when it has been used in the context of language instruction, has usually referred to the collection and evaluation of information to answer the question: what aspect of the language does some particular group of learns need to know? It is impossible to teach the whole of a language, as Mackey
(1965:161) puts it: “Selection is an inherent characteristic of all methods.” Tarone and Yule (1989) mention the view of “system level” needs analysis: Collection and analysis of data on the linguistic and social context of the classroom; the characteristics of the educational system within which language instruction will take place; the attitudes of all participants toward the learning process itself; the career goals of typical students in the program, and so on. But they say such information is of course essential to the planning of the curriculum for any language program. However, needs analysis only at the system level would focus upon the broad sociopolitical and educational context in which the learners will need to use the language – but would not provide specific information about the communicative behavior of fluent speakers. Strictly, system-level needs analyses would not describe the three components of native speaker communicative ability (see below) with the degree of detail needed in order for the teacher to select precisely those aspects of the language which need to be taught.

Tarone and Yule then briefly explain these three components of communicative ability as:

- Analysis in terms of communicative competence
- Analysis from the ‘inside’ perspective
- Analysis of need at four levels of generality
They quote the three dimensions of communicative competence based on Canale and Swain (1980). The three dimensions are:

*Grammatical competence* - Ability to produce and understand correct syntactic, lexical, and phonological forms in a language

*Sociolinguistic competence* – Ability to use a language appropriately in socio-cultural contexts

*Strategic competence* - Ability to effectively transmit information to a listener, including the ability to use communication strategies to solve problems which arise in this procedure

An analysis of what a learner needs to know in the second language will usually reveal that the learner needs all three components of communicative competence. In the present Kerala context, the learners may encounter native speakers of the language outside the classroom in a variety of social situations, and will need to negotiate a wide variety of encounters in the second language. For this purpose, their language will need to be grammatical, appropriate, and effective.

By the analysis from the ‘inside’ perspective Tarone and Yule quote Hutchinson and Waters (1980):
There is a disquieting trend isolating needs analysis from other aspects of teaching and learning. The application of elaborate analysis models (e.g. Munby 1978) demands a curriculum ‘expert, a creature apart from the teachers and learners… the inevitable ‘paper reality’ takes its place – static, stereotyped, compartmentalized (p.1).

Classroom teachers, after all, are faced with actual individuals in a real place in real time, and they may find some discrepancies between the curriculum which has been given to them and the needs of their particular learners. Such discrepancies may arise because the decision-making procedure so beautifully outlined in books such as those mentioned above has not been followed very well—possibly an English language teacher in a country where teaching methods are very traditional has been given a textbook with a communicative syllabus, and finds that the students will not accept communicative methods and materials. More commonly, discrepancies may arise simply because of individual variation. While any general needs analysis may effectively establish the norm for a typical class within a particular social and educational system, in fact, every group individual learners is different and may vary from that norm in unforeseen ways. For example, Sorensen (1982) describes a situation in which she found, after teaching an ESL class for three weeks, that the textbook she
had been assigned did not focus on the language skill needed by that group of students.

The very situation arose in 2003 when *Meanings into Words* (Doff, Jones and Mitchell)--a grammar book, published by CUP, special edition for Kerala, 2002--was introduced to the first year higher secondary students in Kerala. The book was originally prepared for the intermediate learners of Cambridge University. Most of the situations given in it were totally alien to the people of Kerala. The strangeness of the socio-cultural background of the contexts posed heavy hurdles for both learners and teachers.

The third component of communicative ability is the analysis of needs at four levels of generality. Such an analysis may, of course, focus upon either written or spoken language at all four levels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Area specified</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global</strong></td>
<td>The situations in which learners will need to use the language, and language-related activities which typically occur in those situations</td>
<td>In university classes: lecturing, taking notes, asking questions, reading blackboard notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rhetorical</strong></td>
<td>The typical way information is organized in any language-related activity</td>
<td>In university lectures: an initial transition from yesterday’s lecture,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical – rhetorical</td>
<td>Those language forms used to realize the information structure of the language activity</td>
<td>(In the section of a lecture which reviews standard procedures) – use of the passive aspect as opposed to the active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical</td>
<td>The frequency with which language forms are used in different communication situations</td>
<td>(In engineering lectures) – the relative percentages of active and passive verb forms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The global level specifies the situations in which learners may need to use the language and the language-related activities required in those situations. At the global level, the basic question is, ‘What do these students need to use the language for?’ The aim, then, is to describe those types of communicative situations in which the learners will be using the language: where do the learners intend to use their second language, and what sorts of activities take place in those situations? Will the learners be waiting on tables, taking notes in engineering lecture halls, reading journal articles on veterinary medicine, reading technical manuals on the repair of engine parts, participating in class discussions? Or will they simply need to know enough of the language to pass a standardized test at the end of the term? Will they be required to transfer
information from one mode to another, for example, from written prose to visual diagrams, or vice versa?

Once the essential facts about the global level are known, one may then investigate the rhetorical level. The rhetorical level relates to the organization of information in the discourse which occurs within any given situation. Here one may ask ‘How is information organized in the written texts encountered by the learner in the situations identified at the global level?’ Another sort of approach which has recently been taken at the rhetorical level requires an analysis of the organization of an interaction in terms of functions. The subset of functions studied most is that of illocutionary function, or ‘speech act’. Here, one might ask ‘what language functions are required to be expressed or understood within communication situation x?’ In waiting on tables, for example, do participants typically have to express an opinion, disagree, interrupt, summarize? Which of these speech acts occurs most frequently? Note that here we are asking about the communicative behavior of users of the target language.

At the grammatical-rhetorical level, the goal of analysis is to determine what linguistic forms are used to realize the information structure established at the rhetorical level. For example, if one determines that journal articles in a particular field have a typical rhetorical organization, one may then ask, ‘What language forms are used to signal that organization?’ Perhaps it is verb tense or verb aspects that are used to signal the way information is typically organized and presented within such articles. If we are using the speech-act approach, once we have determined that fluent speakers frequently employ the function of ‘expressing opinion’ in academic discussions, we may go on to determine what linguistic forms are used by native speakers of the target language to realize that
function. In practice, most researchers do not separate the rhetorical and the grammatical-rhetorical levels in their work. Most grammatical-rhetorical analyses are presented in two stages: first the rhetorical analysis, and second, the analysis if the way grammatical forms signal the rhetorical structure of the discourse.

Finally, the grammatical level relates to the frequency with which grammatical forms are used in specific communicative situations. At this level, we encounter a purely quantitative (as opposed to qualitative) form of analysis. Here the question is: ‘What is the frequency of the grammatical forms used by fluent speakers of the target language in the sets of communication situations identified in the analysis at the global level?’ For example, how frequent is the simple present tense in newspapers? How frequent is it in academic writing? Is the passive voice used more in scientific writing than in everyday conversation? The answers to questions like these must be considered at the system level in selecting and sequencing points of instruction in different syllabuses: the passive might need to be taught sooner to those who plan to go to higher studies at the university than to tourists planning only to engage in informal conversations with speakers of the target language.

So far we have been discussing what the learners need to know. Now when we think of what the learners do and do not know, we think of the standardized proficiency tests designed by specialists.

Sociolinguistic competence, as mentioned earlier, is one of the communicative competences presented by Canale and Swain. Sociolinguistic skills in a language entails mastery of speech act convention, norms of stylistic appropriateness, and the uses of language to establish and maintain social
relations. For example, how to apologize, compliment, refuse etc. in the most appropriate manner. In recent years language teachers have attempted to move away from teaching only the grammatical forms of the language and have attempted to teach students to use the language communicatively, through language functions, speech acts and the like. Instead of teaching the present progressive tense of the verb, followed by the past progressive, followed by relative clauses, they began to teach students expressions used for complaints, followed by apologies, followed by invitations.

A typical illustrative example where the present way of teaching fails to train the learners in developing socio-linguistic competence is as follows:

There are different ways of getting someone to give you something, --“Give me that pen!” or “Can I have that pen?” Both of these linguistic expressions are equally well formed in grammatical terms, but part of an English speaker’s knowledge of the language would involve a recognition that they would each convey different things, according to their context of use. Very generally, one would the first to be treated as a direct command and the second to be treated as an indirect request. These instances are quoted to point out that though there was a great sense of excitement during the initial phase among language teachers at the prospect of being able to provide a more communicative oriented syllabus, in due course they realized the absence of sociolinguistic as well as grammatical competence became solid block in effective communication. Grammatical terms had become totally strange to the learners’ ears. Today the intermediate learners and their parents are pleading to English teachers to arrange extra classes to teach vocabulary and grammar. They do not know that
these two elements of language cannot be taught within a short period of time, especially if the learner has to ‘use’ language.

Tarone and Yule (1989) quote their experience with this kind of a communicatively oriented syllabus as highly disappointing. Their anxiety is equally shared by teachers in our state when they come across questions like: ‘You have rented a room in Ms. Nair’s house. Here are some things that you want to do: a. a sofa in your room; b. a plug point in the study; c. a shed for your motor bike. Ask Ms. Nair politely to do these things for you (use, ‘I'd like to …’; ‘could I possibly have …’; ‘Do you mind…?’).’

According to Tarone and Yule this kind of questions will definitely capture a negative reaction from Ms. Nair. The reason they find …the speech act approach is primarily strategic rather than sociolinguistic: that is the focus is upon teaching students how to get a given general meaning across, with minimal attention paid either to sociolinguistic nuances, or to the implications of choosing. The problem is that these labeled lists did not provide students with enough information to enable them to use the terms in context with any degree of confidence…’ (p. 90-91).

In fact, we need to know more about the sociolinguistic appropriacy of the various linguistic expressions used by learners to realize speech acts, and, if syllabuses are to be organized in terms of speech acts, we need to provide learners with more precise information about the social meaning inherent in their choice of one linguistic expression versus another to realize a particular speech act. That means much need to be learned about the socio linguistic skills of
second language learners. Rivers (1983) describes the language learners’ need for sociolinguistic competence this way: ‘Students need to understand how language is used in relation to the structure of society and its patterns of inner and outer relationships, if they are to avoid clashes, misunderstandings and hurt’ (p.25). That means we must step back from a narrow focus on the linguistic forms used in speech acts and make the learners aware of the social dimension of the language use by providing an interactive atmosphere where their language use is analyzed, modified and refined through group discussions and assessments. Dialogue writing is another discourse where ESL students in Kerala are led to utterly nonsensical way of writing. Lack of sociolinguistic skill of the teachers and learners reflect in the students’ performance. Here we come across the crux of the problem:

What should the syllabus consist of to improve sociolinguistic competence?

How should the language teacher help language learners develop this competence?

Tarone and Yule (op. cited) suggest that the language teacher in fact should not follow a structured, discrete-point syllabus; instead use a problem-solving, task-based approach similar to the interactive learning approach described by Heath (1986). Here learners are asked to tape record or use readymade records of actual language use of friends, family members, workers, executives and of people from other walks of life. Each conversation is heard, analyzed, discussed in the whole class. Good classical English movies with subtitles will be ideal for these sessions. Such interactive sessions will definitely help learners to realize how much they know and how much they do not. The language itself becomes
both the focus, and the medium of such discussions. Moreover, this helps instruction as well as need analysis.

A lesson plan for a unit with sociolinguistic competence as its objective is different from the one for grammatical competence or any other competence. Native speaker’s interaction models are the ones that are authentic in planning lessons. So, after interaction, a transcription session can be included for creating interest and learning opportunities at the same time. Finally, a ten minute reflection on what is being accomplished by the language in terms of social interaction will be beneficial.

It is very difficult for our students to get native speaker’s conversation taped from real life situation. So buying ready- made CDs or downloading standardized materials from internet will do. Hence, task-based, problem solving activities will create opportunities to develop the organizing and negotiating aspects of international language use. Reports from the Bangalore Project (Prabhu: 1987) support this idea along with Johnson (1982), and Brumfit (1984).

To sum up, for teaching sociolinguistic skills we should adopt an essentially inductive and integrative approach with the prominent use of elicited native speaker data in identifiable contexts as a key element. The learner should be put in an interactive role where these data are to be discussed, analyzed and transcribed so that the learners and teachers become aware of the learner needs in this area. But, it is to be borne in mind that even native speakers may make mistakes and errors.

Strategic competence, as one of the communicative competences, involves the capacity to select effective means of transmitting information, and a range of expressions which are likely to provide that means. In short it has to do with the
ability to successfully get ones meaning across to particular listeners. For ESL learners, two broad areas relate to strategic competence: The overall skill in successfully transmitting or interpreting information and the use of communication strategies by a speaker or listener when problems arise in the process of transmitting information.

Studies show that over-elaboration and circumlocution are two strategies used by non-native speakers in transacting information. Approximation, literal translation, miming or the use of non-verbal means, message abandonment and outright topic avoidance are identified as strategies by non-native speakers. Conducting task-based activities like describing an object, describing a process, opposing/supporting an argument etc. will reveal the learner needs in this area.

Now that we have discussed the different levels of needs analysis, let us think of the methodology of investigation. Cohen and Hosenfeld (1981), Gardner and Lambert (1972), Yule, Hoffman and Damico (1987), all provide a number of tools and methods to collect data on learner needs. Questionnaires ‘think aloud’ activities, diaries, self-observations and interviews are the main tools selected. Out of these, questionnaires and interviews are so common that no detailed discussion is needed on the type. Self-assessment procedures and think-aloud protocols need a brief discussion. Oskarsson (1978) and Savignon (1972) give a number of questionnaires for self observation (Appendix).

Strategies like think – aloud protocol is also used as a tool to collect data on learner needs and learner strategies. Macaro (2001) defines this as: “… a process of articulating one’s thoughts and actions as one are carrying them out. This is usually called a think-aloud protocol” (p.60). The normal procedure for
eliciting the data from a think-aloud protocol (when it is used as a tool) is to take the following steps:

1. Provide a student with a task and ensure that they understand what they have to do to accomplish it.

2. Find ways of making them feel at ease.

3. Explain that you want them to articulate their thought processes and the strategies that they use while they are actually carrying out the task.

4. Demonstrate how this thinking aloud process can be done by doing some of it yourselves (with a similar task).

5. Start recording.

6. Start the student off.

7. Prompt the student if they are not articulating their thoughts and actions sufficiently.

8. Prompt but avoid phrases like “Are you sure?” and “That’s good”. Instead, use only phrases like: “What makes you say that?”; “What made you do that?”; “What are you thinking at this moment?”; “Please keep talking.”

9. Listen to the recording of the think-aloud process (after the session) and make a list of all the strategies used by the student.

10. Look carefully through the results of the task (after the session). What features of it might have been improved by better (or more frequent) strategy use?
This procedure helps the teacher to know the cognitive processes taking place when the learner involves in a task and thereby teachers can change their strategies of teaching or help the learners in using better strategies to learn. See chapter four for further evidence in the effective use of think-aloud protocol as a learning strategy and teaching strategy.

Although it is not always included in discussions of the language learning process, self-confidence and self-esteem (which are discussed in Chapter II) are normally assumed to have an influence in successful learning. According to Beebe (1983), the healthy self-esteem of most good learners keeps them from thinking that their errors make them look foolish. Brown (1977) suggests that ‘a person with high self-esteem is able to reach out beyond himself more freely, to be less inhibited, and because of his ego strength, to make the necessary mistakes involved in language learning with less threat to his ego’ (p. 352). In Krashen’s theory (1981), self-confidence is specifically identified as an important aspect of the affective filter in that it enables the learner to encourage intake or useful input. Conversely, we would expect that lack of self-confidence would be an inhibiting factor for learners and this receives some support from the report by Naiman et al. (1978) that teachers, in their survey, felt that poor learners lacked self-confidence. So, needs analysis in self-confidence is also needed to plan or implement strategies.

Very confident wrong answering and non confident correct answering are other traits we find in certain learners. However if the learners have chosen that wrong answer with complete (false) confidence, then they may be unwilling or not ready to accept that they are having trouble with the particular linguistic feature. eg. Use of has/have with past time adverbial, be + died, etc. On the other
hand, with the non confident correct answering types may have to review that aspect of the second language again. In autonomous learning self-monitoring ability is to be encouraged so that once their needs are analyzed the teacher can direct them towards better learning strategies using appropriate materials and techniques.

Leslie Dickinson (1987) cites Allwright’s and Harding-Esch’s needs questionnaires which can be used for self-analysis of needs. See Appendix.

Michael Long (2005) suggests a comprehensive list of the sources and methods for needs analysis (NA) in second language (pp.24-48). With the proliferation of language tests (standardized) in the form of books and through net, the above mentioned competences can be assessed for NA, especially for a small group. When it comes to a large group (for the entire state or level) triangulated sources and triangulated methods should be used. (“A comparison of results from faculty, interviews, student questionnaires, and the document analysis would be triangulation by sources and methods”: Long, p.29). NA for the whole group of intermediate learners or for each stream (science, commerce, humanities etc.), or for each socio-cultural group, can be conducted using triangulation. Curriculum and syllabus promoting learning autonomy should conduct ‘needs analysis’ surveys, before selecting materials and methodology, for the actual realization of their objectives.

III.19. Working examples

Before concluding this chapter, the practicality of the theories and methods should be examined in the light of the ‘working examples’ if any. Over the years, a number of systems have been used for adult learners suggesting different
facilities for autonomous learning. CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches d’Applications Pedagogiques en Langues) mentioned in chapter one, is a system run by University of Nancy in France, providing facilities for self directed learning of English for learners within the University and for the general public outside. Learners have the choice between following a normal evening class course and learning autonomously. Those who opt for autonomy are allocated to a helper—a native or competent speaker of English experienced in assisting autonomous learners—and together they work towards establishing the learner’s needs and goals, identifying constraints such as time available for learning and ability to come to CRAPEL, and finally they make preliminary decisions about materials methods and techniques of learning. The role of the helper in CRAPEL system is concerned chiefly with helping the learner to learn how to learn. This includes analyzing needs, learning about techniques for using authentic texts, learning how to find materials and how to use them, and helping with matters such as organization of time and so on. The helper resists becoming a language teacher, and tries to prevent helping sessions from becoming merely private tuitions. The learner’s pedagogical situation is that of semi autonomy. Large resources of authentic materials and specially prepared materials are used with access to the sound and video library. Assessment in the CRAPEL system is carried out by the learner himself. CRAPEL also conducts ESP courses for other agencies. There are many systems working in the model of CRAPEL in other parts of the world.

The Cambridge system: Begun in 1966 in the University of Cambridge, the users include under graduates, post graduates and staff members all with a great diversity of needs. The system takes advantage of the university’s traditional preference for independent study. The self-access system working
here aims learner-centered, motivation-based, autonomous language learning. The self-access centre provides all facilities to select materials of specific purpose, to learn teaching techniques of learning, to assess oneself and going to higher levels.

The British Council: As an alternative to conventional teacher-led instruction, James McCafferty (1982) developed a self-access system to be used in the Direct Teaching of English Operation (DTEO) of the British Council. Though he had a good vision, the system existed only in his vision. Dickinson (1987) gives a detailed description of McCafferty’s plan of the self-access centre which can be considered as a model in our country.

There are many other SALC’s (self-access learning centers) mushrooming in different parts of the world especially in China and in India.

IIT Mumbai has a self-access website named Ekalavya which provides help to those who did not get admission in the IIT’s but have the potential to learn on their own. At Kozhikode, the corporation authorities are planning an SALC for the school children up to class XII. More about SALCs is given later in this study.

In China, to compensate the shortage of good English teachers, they have established a number of self-access centers, which are to foster learner autonomy too. However, preparing learners to access such centers should be considered as one of the priorities of senior secondary education.

III. 20. Conclusion

To conclude with, this chapter has examined in detail the different and disparate philosophical perspectives converging towards learner autonomy taking into account the behaviorist principles, structural theories, cognitive and
constructive theories, humanist psychology and the theories stemmed out of it like: experiential learning, cooperative learning, collaborative teaching, reflection and awareness/conscious raising. While thinking about the different ways and means of language acquisition, the thinkers and scholars like Labov, Skinner, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Chomsky, Krashen, Ryle, Bloom and others have been referred to. The ESL learning/acquisition, competence/performance, adaptation, perception and cognition, LAD and ZPD, cultural psychology and narrative, individual construct and social construct of meaning, teaching and facilitating, guiding and counseling etc. are a few terms that call for special attention in this chapter. As the first step of implementing these theories and ideas, needs analysis (NA) has been included here, in this chapter itself. NA is divided into two: learners’ concrete needs such as job requirements, and requirements for learning ESL. Again, the needs are treated as subjective needs and objective needs. Since autonomous learning demands more attention on subjective needs than objective needs, this chapter goes into two sets of priorities – individual differences and learning styles. In other words psychological or cognitive bearing on learning style of each individual and the different strategies to be acquired by the learner through pedagogy are studied, based on the experimental studies of Oxford and her associates, Tarone and Yule, Canale and Swain, Hutchinson and Waters, O’Malley and Chamot and others. For learning styles, Ian Tudor, Oxford and Ehrman and others are referred to.

Subjective needs of learners are again divided into various levels with sufficient illustrations and suggestions. Certain strategies and tools to collect data on learner needs (e.g. think-aloud protocol) are also listed in this chapter.
and finally the names of the self-learning centers acknowledged internationally are also mentioned to substantiate the practical functioning of the very idea of learner autonomy or learning how to learn through self-access centers.

Based on the needs analysis, the next step is to think of the strategies to be adopted so that the learner needs are met. So next chapter tries to explore the numerous styles and strategies identified by the researchers in this field, selecting the ones appropriate for the target group of this study, and then trying it out on a selected students in the target group, and after studying the results, suggesting what to do and how in the concluding chapter.