CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

English Language Teaching (ELT) has developed into an interdisciplinary research area, both at theoretical and empirical levels. One of the consequences of the growth of ELT as a discipline is the emergence of various alternative approaches to the teaching of English. The developments in linguistic theory also seem to have contributed to the diversity within ELT research and practices. Among the several shifts in English language pedagogy, a noteworthy one is the ever increasing influence of the Communicative Approach, after the mid-seventies. (Stern, 1983).

The underlying principle in the communicative approach to language teaching is to develop among learners the skills to perform various communicative tasks such as asking questions, answering questions, inviting, greeting, thanking and so on. A number of course books have been prepared by a wide range of authors, who organize teaching materials along communicative principles and provide learners with various tasks to be performed in the classroom. The central assumption of these course books is that by doing the assigned communicative activities, learners will be able to use the English language outside the classroom also. However, this can at best be only an idealistic
notion concerning the efficacy of the communicative approach. Stern (1983:259-260) critiques the techniques and materials used in the communicative approach thus:

While these procedures have stimulated a great deal of interest among practitioners, the gap between the inventories of language items in a “syllabus” and the teaching materials, teaching techniques, and testing procedures which carry out these syllabuses into effect has been difficult to bridge, and even now these difficulties have not yet been entirely overcome.

In its early phase, during 1960’s, ELT had focused on ensuring learners' sound knowledge of grammatical features of language in the hope that this linguistic knowledge of structures and forms would develop learners' proficiency in the language. Unfortunately, learners ended up gaining knowledge of grammatical items but this knowledge did not help them in using the language in real world social situations. This resulted in the emergence of the communicative approach in 1970’s, which underscored the fact that linguistic competence alone would not help learners gain proficiency in language use. However, this approach had its own limitations. Idealized, constructed conversational pieces of everyday situations became the course content.

The researcher, from his several years of experience as a teacher of English, has observed that the available English language teaching materials, in the form of prescribed textbooks and related course books restrict themselves to teaching and developing predictable responses among learners when they use English in various social situations.
To state it more clearly, these teaching materials focus on “direct” and “unambiguous” utterances while teaching English from a communicative perspective. However, in real life situations, language users, more often than not, make “indirect” and “ambiguous” utterances, with various motives, which can only be interpreted through knowledge of the particular socio-cultural context in which they are made. Therefore, effective course materials for teaching English as a second language must take into account the multiplicity of utterance meanings and attempt to develop in learners the skills of negotiating the subtleties of interpersonal communication. These skills contribute to the learners' pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence may be defined, according to V. Saraswati (2003:60), as "the ability of the speaker to understand the hidden contextual meanings of utterances and produce appropriate responses." The recognition of the need to develop pragmatic competence among learners leads to the corollary that teaching materials in the communicative approach need to be reorganized so as to be able to develop a general pragmatic attitude among the learners.

In the light of the emergence of a pragmatic approach in the last three decades or so in the West, where pedagogical instruction has been widely used and the application which showed positive results, pedagogues in India have not realized the importance of incorporating the same in its curricula. Unless the pragmatic approach is accommodated it will be increasingly frustrating experience for the learners when they realize that in spite of studying English for so long, they are still unable to perform well in producing utterances in socially appropriate manner.
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The primary concern of the study is to establish the fact that the methods of and approaches to teaching English in Indian pedagogical practices need to be enhanced in some respects. As already stated, approaches to English language teaching focused themselves on providing learners with knowledge of linguistic structures and forms with the belief that equipping learners with linguistic competence provides proficiency in the language. It is an acknowledged fact that linguistic competence alone will not help learners use language successfully.

The role of a pragmatic approach in the ESL classroom becomes significant when one discovers how it bridges the gap between learners' linguistic knowledge and their inability to perform appropriately and adequately in various real social situations. Teaching pragmatic competence is widely regarded as an integral part of learning and teaching a language and has been widely investigated by Canale and Swain (1980), Leech (1983), Thomas (1983), Wildner-Bassett (1986), Bachman (1990), Bouton (1994a), Bachman & Palmer (1996), Bardovi-Harlig (1996), Rose and Kasper (2001), Bardovi-Harlig and Goffin (2005). Therefore, it is imperative for language pedagogues to realize and recognize the importance of a pragmatic approach and its advantages, benefits and utility. They need to be aware of the new direction that pragmatics provides to second language teaching and learning. Hence, the present study purports to provide a new
direction to the preparation of methods and materials of teaching English as a second language, beyond the stereotypical materials that exist.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the present study is to broaden the Communicative Language Teaching perspective by including a pragmatic component in the syllabus, in order to overcome the learners’ difficulties in communicating successfully in the English language use by raising pragmatic awareness through pragmalinguistic routines and sociopragmatic appropriateness in the classroom.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

In the context of Communicative Language Teaching in India, classroom teaching needs to focus on the pragmatic context of utterances rather than on their linguistic/structuralistic formal content. In the process learners are likely to encounter unpredictable communicative situations, where utterances "mean" differently from what they purport to "say". Thus any methodology and material of communicative teaching of English as a second language will have to take into account the pragmatic potential or hidden meanings of utterances. Within the heterogeneity of English classrooms, which implies diverse socio-cultural background, different mindsets, teaching pragmatic insights become all the more indispensible. This is because of the pragmatic distance between the learners' first language and the target language. Therefore, the hypothesis for the present study can be stated as follows:
Pragmatic competence in English as second language can be developed through explicit and interventional teaching in which learners' acquire a holistic understanding of the language.

In other words, the inclusion of pragmatic concepts in a teacher fronted classroom situation will have a positive effect on learners’ proficiency in English as second language.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the present study makes a judicious combination of both theoretical and empirical approaches.

1.5.1 PROCEDURES

a. From the literature review on the theoretical front(Chapter 2), the studies done on Austin & Searle's Speech Act Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principles, Leech's Politeness Principles, and others form the base for the pragmatic treatment programme (Chapter 3 Section 3.4). The models of Blum Kulka, House and Kasper's (1989) classic format, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's (1993) dialogue construction, Safont-Jorda's (2003) open item verbal response, Hudson, Detmer and Brown's(1995) open item free response construction and Billmyer and Varghese's (2000) situational background are adapted by the researcher in the Written Completion Discourse Test (WDCT) as an instrument to measure pragmatic competence of the learners.
b. The **empirical study** involves,

(i) the administration of a grammar test (Appendix A) for the purpose of selecting learners with minimum linguistic competence in order to form a Select Group.

(ii) **the pretest** (see Appendix B) in the format of a Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) was administered to the Select Group. The pretest contained thirty questions based on *Literal/Non Literal Utterances, Inferencing Implicatures, Forming Requests, Complaints, Apologies, Compliments/Compliment Responses, Hedges*, identifying correct *Speech Act Functions and Felicity Conditions* in order to test the learners' pragmatic awareness prior to pragmatic treatment.

(iii) **the materials** (see Chapter 3 Section 3.4.2) for pragmatic treatment were designed based on the performance of the learners in the pretest.

(iv) a ten day programme (Chapter 3 Section 3.4) which served as a **pragmatic treatment** of four clock hours a day was designed for classroom implementation. The programme consisted of metapragmatic treatment of *speech acts forms and functions, speech acts classification, inferencing, implicatures, hedges, performative verbs and felicity conditions*.

(v) **a posttest** (Appendix C) which was in the same format as that of the pretest, with similar task difficulty was administered on the Select Group.

(vi) a comparison of the scores of the pretest and posttest for measuring the development of pragmatic competence in the learners(Chapter 4 Table 1).
1.5.2 INSTRUMENT

The instrument used for the present study was in the format of a WDCT (Chapter 3 Section 3.3) for pre and posttest. The pretest was designed with the following types of testing items viz., gap filling items, matching items and completion items. The pretest comprised questions that pertain to those aspects of pragmatic literature that were designed for classroom instruction (see Appendices B & C). This design was chosen to assess learners' performance in dealing with their abilities to use language pragmatically in a variety of sociocultural contexts. With the help of the results of the pretest, the researcher formulated the instructional materials for classroom implementation.

The posttest comprising similar task difficulty with different scenarios as in the case of pretest was administered on the Select Group after the pragmatic treatment.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Past studies in communicative competence focused either on speech act realizations or implicatures. The present study, firstly, goes beyond the studies previously undertaken, by combining speech act productions and implicatures and also including other important aspects of pragmatics like hedges, performative verbs and felicity conditions. Secondly, the development of pragmatic competence was undertaken through explicit and interventional instruction, thereby serving the purpose of this study i.e. integration of pragmatic literature into Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) so as to enhance the
learners' pragmatic competence. In other words, the study aimed at helping learners understand and produce indirect utterances in different sociocultural contexts and also empowering them to use language in socially appropriate ways. Therefore, the empirical study undertaken here supports the necessity for incorporating the pragmatic component into a communicative approach in order to help learners obtain a holistic understanding of the target language and to perform better in various sociocultural settings and situations.

1.7 LIMITATIONS

The study restricts itself to four speech acts productions, viz., requests, complaints, compliment/compliment responses and apologies. The purpose of restricting to the above mentioned aspects of pragmatics was that the learners were not exposed to any pragmatic aspect earlier. Therefore, four basic speech act productions that were most often encountered were selected. Apart from these speech act productions, conversational implicatures, hedges, performative verbs, speech act functions and felicity conditions were also included in the teaching materials for classroom instruction.

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1 throws light on the narrow view of pedagogical approach to CLT and therefore the need for broadening it by incorporating pragmatic content in Communicative Language Teaching approach. It is, therefore, hypothesized that teacher fronted explicit
instruction may be effective for the development of pragmatic competence in a second language. Chapter 2 offers a review of the relevant L2 developing pragmatic and second language acquisition literature in motivating the variables of the study. Areas of focus in the second chapter, which enunciates the theoretical framework include, the notions of instruction, output, and means of developing pragmatic competence in L2. Chapter 3 presents the design and methodology of the research study. In Chapter 4, the results of the empirical study, their analysis and the pragmatic acceptability of the participants’ responses are presented. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the outcome of study i.e., its findings and conclusions as well as suggestions for future research in the field of developing L2 pragmatics competence.

1.9 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

**Acquisition**: The gradual, often non-linear, internalization of a given linguistic form, as demonstrated by the ability of a speaker/listener to perceive and produce the form, which she was not previously able to perceive or produce (Doughty, 2003; Norris & Ortega, 2003).

**Communicative competence**: The overall ability of a speaker/listener to process and produce language and paralanguage effectively for the purpose of conveying information in real-world contexts (Cazden, 2001).
**Developmental pragmatics:** The study of learners’ developing interlanguage pragmatic competence, by means of which they are able to process and communicate desired meanings to other speakers of the L2 (Ohta, 2005).

**Discourse completion task (DCT):** A type of written or oral questionnaire that offers speakers the opportunity to respond to a simulated situation that targets a specific speech act or set of speech acts (Yuan, 2001).

**Face:** The self-image that a person has and expects others to respect in public interaction (Yule, 1996).

**Grammar component:** A module within an overall model of communicative competence that filters the input and output that a speaker/listener can process and produce (Kasper, 2001).

**Illocutionary force:** The aspect of a speech act that has to do with the speaker’s point, or intention, in producing the utterance (Yule, 1996).

**Input:** Linguistic stimuli (verbal or written), produced with the intention of communication, to which a speaker/listener is exposed (VanPatten, 2004).

**Instruction:** Formal methods designed to assist learners in the acquisition of a second language (Doughty, 2003).

**Intake:** A subset of input that is actually attended to by a speaker/listener and, in the case of a language learner that is processed and comprehended by the developing system (VanPatten, 2002).

**Integrative processing:** the assimilation and organization of related forms into a coherent set, involving multiple operations performed together (Izumi, 2002; Robinson, 1995).
**Interlanguage pragmatics:** In a model of developing L2 pragmatic competence, the interlanguage pragmatic component is the locus of processing of pragmalinguistic forms, taking into account the sociopragmatic context (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 2005).

**Metapragmatic awareness:** Explicit knowledge that a speaker/listener possesses about the forms and functions of pragmatic speech acts (House, 1996).

**Output:** Linguistic production, either oral or written, that is communicative in purpose (Swain, 1985).

**Pragmalinguistic forms:** Linguistic forms that are used to achieve certain speaker purposes (e.g., apologizing, complimenting, responding to requests, etc.) within the context of communication (Takahashi, 2005a).

**Pragmalinguistic proficiency:** The degree to which one is able to use appropriate linguistic forms to realize speech acts and their associated strategies (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983).

**Pragmatic competence:** The ability of a speaker/listener to achieve desired effects or convey intended meanings in the course of communicative interaction (Kasper & Roever, 2005; LoCastro, 2001).

**Pragmatic filter:** A cognitive device that limits or constrains the pragmalinguistic intake entering a learner’s developing pragmatic system, theoretically in response, in part, to the sociopragmatic context in which the input was produced (by analogy with Krashen’s, 1985, affective filter).
**Pragmatic speech act:** An illocutionary act; i.e., a speech act considered specifically in terms of its connection to the communicative intent of the speaker who produced it (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

**Pragmatics:** The way in which speakers use language to achieve desired effects, make reference to implicit concepts, or convey intended meanings in communicative interaction in social and cultural contexts (Cummings, 2005).

**Second language acquisition (SLA):** The process by which a person learns to process and produce a language that is not her first language (Norris & Ortega, 2003).

**Socioculturally conditioned cues:** Linguistic and non-linguistic signals that allow a speaker/listener to know how to modify her own linguistic production in order to be pragmatically and sociolinguistically appropriate (Al-Issa, 2003; Ohta, 2005).

**Sociolinguistic competence:** The ability of a speaker/listener to produce and perceive linguistic forms in ways that are appropriate for the social situation in which the forms are produced (Canale & Swain, 1980; Cohen, 1996).

**Sociopragmatic proficiency:** The degree to which one is able to negotiate social situations involving social variables in pragmatically appropriate ways, including the ability to perceive and produce language that is sensitive to the context (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983).

**Speech act:** A communicative action, realized by means of spoken or written language and drawing on the social and cultural context that reflects the intended meaning of the speaker or the speaker’s desired effect (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Searle, 1979).
ACRONYMS USED

CLT - Communicative Language Teaching

DCT - Discourse Completion Test/Task

ELT – English Language Teaching

ESL – English as a Second Language

SLA - Second Language Acquisition

WDCT- Written Discourse Completion Test