CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION AND ITS IMPACT
CHAPTER V

SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON VOCABULARY LEARNING

5.1 General

An analysis of the errors committed by the students led the researcher to find out if there exists some link between the background of the students and their vocabulary. Do the aspects of gender, social and economic background the medium of instruction and the mother tongue have an impact on their repertoire? Do these in any way affect the language learning style of the students? Is there some link between the kind of errors and the aforementioned factors? These questions initiated the researcher into the field of sociolinguistics.

5.2 Sociolinguistics

“Sociolinguistics is the study of language in its social contexts and the study of social life through linguistics” (Nickolas Coupland & Adam Jaworski, 1997, p 1). “A significant fact about the behaviour of human beings in relation to their social environment is that a large part of it is linguistic behaviour. The study of man presupposes the study of language and social man” (Michael Halliday, 1997, p 31). “The investigation of language as social behaviour is not only relevant to the understanding of social culture; it is also relevant to the understanding of language”. (Michael Halliday, 1997, p 35).
The distinction between sociolinguistics and sociology of language is that while the former focuses on the impact of society on the language, the latter deals with the influence of language on the society. Sociolinguistics studies the variations that exist in language usage among people segregated on the basis of certain social variables like age, education, ethnicity, gender, religion, status etc. One major reason that could be attributed to the importance of sociolinguistics study is that the link between language and society forms the base for the language planning done by the government through the educational system. “Performance in linguistic skills (literacy in reading and writing, oracy in listening and speaking) is taken as an indicator of educational level and intelligence, and provides access to the whole range of education in the first place”. (Peter Stockwell, 2002, p 56). Sociolinguists make explicit the theoretical frameworks for presenting the link between language and other variables.

“Language is one of the most important forms of human symbolic behaviour and is a key component of many social identities” (Nickolas Coupland & Adam Jaworski, 1997, p 323). Most sociolinguistic studies have investigated the impact of social stratification on language use. Developing sociolinguistic theory has demonstrated that people’s attitudes and perceptions towards language help shape their usage, and these perceptions shape governmental and educational policy and language planning.

Language is only meaningful in a social setting. Language and society are not theoretically distinct concepts. Language is itself a form of social action. Speaking and writing are the fulfillment of purposes which are defined socially and culturally. “Equally we might argue that society itself is concept that depends intimately on exchange of meanings between people.
and therefore on language" (Nickolas Coupland & Adam Jaworski, 1997, p 7). The attitudes towards languages reflect and perpetuate social divisions and discrimination and a better understanding of language in society can alleviate the problems of discrimination in the society.

Language has a social setting and it varies from place to place and society to society. Social setting influences language use in both in the intergroup and intragroup interaction. “Social factors probably have an indirect rather than a direct effect on L2 learning. In particular, they are likely to be mediated by the attitudes that the learners hold. Social factors shape learners’ attitudes, which in turn, determine learning outcomes” (Rod Ellis, 1994, p 24).

5.3 Social Factors that Influence L2 Learning

The social factors that influence L2 acquisition are likely to differ according to the context, which can clearly be demarcated as natural and educational setting. In the natural setting, the learner is placed in such a predicament that he learns to use the language in the most natural way, being constantly exposed to the target language, and forced to use it in his day-to-day social and official interactions. On the other hand, the educational setting refers to the context of learning the use of language in the classrooms. Significant variations are found among the learners associated with these two settings. The differences that learners exhibit in the process of L2 acquisition, particularly in the rate of development and the definitive level of achievement, reflect the variables relating to the cognitive, affective, and social aspects of a human being.
There are a number of social factors which have an indelible impact on the attitudes of L2 learners. Weinreich (1974) points out there are at least 10 factors based on which the language shift and maintenance could be studied in detail. They are geographic area, indigenousness, cultural or ethnic identity, religion, race, sex, age, social status, occupational status and nature of the population.

5.4 Social Factors taken up for study

In the current research, discussion will be restricted to only a few of the variables from among the various factors mentioned. They are the variables that have received the most attention in SLA research namely age, geographic variation, sex, social class and ethnic identity.

Attempts have been made to find out whether the socio-economic variables such as the generation of literacy, residential area, sex of the students, and parent’s education have any impact in the vocabulary development of the students. The effects of reading, listening, speaking, as well as, the attitude towards learning English have been probed into, to see if these exerted any kind of influence in the learning of vocabulary. Each variable had been considered separately. Yet, the precise ways in which each variable contributes to L2 learning remained explicable. The intricacy of the strong link between each of the aspects renders it difficult to understand and determine their distinct individual influence on L2 learning.

The informants for the analysis of variations in language were the same sample of 209 students from the three different streams of Engineering. They were told of the purpose and were asked to fill up a
A questionnaire to elicit the required information. The aim was twofold: to evaluate any perceivable difference between the groups and determine its significance in the teaching and learning of vocabulary. The data collected using the questionnaires were analysed and the results are presented in this chapter.

"The factors can be divided into those that are fixed and immutable and those that are variable, influenced by social setting and by actual course of L2 development" (Rod Ellis, 1994, p 35). Both the fixed and variable factors had been analysed to see their impact in the L2 learner's language learning and proficiency.

### 5.4.1 Age

The first factor taken for analysis was age to understand the influence of age over learning the language. Age and learning aptitude of individual learners are both examples of fixed factor, since they are beyond external control. The age group of the sample students selected for study was within the range of 17-20.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the students were in the age group of 18 (61.2%). Only 2.4% students belonged to the last group. The students were in the second semester of the first year and their date of birth revealed that there were only a few months or days of difference among students from two adjacent age groups. This is indicative of the fact that there was not much difference between the age groups either in the age or in the performance. This explains the negligible difference among the students in the VLT and in the strategies employed. As far as this study was concerned, age did not have a significant impact on the learning process or achievement of goals since the students belonged to almost the same age group.

5.4.2 Geographic Variation

The next factor taken into consideration was the geographical area and on the basis of the geographical division of the area of study, the variables considered were,

1. Rural and
2. Urban

The number of students hailing from rural area was almost the same as that of students from urban background. The students from urban area made up 52.15% and the students from the rural area constituted 47.85%. Although, almost equal in number there had not been a remarkable difference between the two as far as vocabulary development is concerned. Generally the students from the urban background perform better than those from rural background. This study too reveals a similar pattern but the difference was insignificant. This directed the researcher to probe into the medium of instruction in their schools. Students were from schools where
the medium of instruction was either English or Tamil. The majority of the students (82.3%) were from English medium schools and the rest (17.7%) from Tamil medium schools. Hence the researcher analysed another parameter the type of schooling and found that the majority of the students (76.6%) came from Matriculation schools (MS). The others were from Government Schools (GS) (18.8%), Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) (3.8%) and Anglo Indian schools (AIS) (1.43%).

**Table 5.2 Geographic Variation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EM</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>TM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBSE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>109</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in table 1, there are matriculation schools where the medium of instruction is English in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas for want of good teachers to teach English, the other subject teachers are forced to handle the language classes and it is taught as yet another subject which proves to be detrimental to the acquisition of language especially vocabulary items. This deprives the students of the little exposure to the English language that they could have got through listening and interaction with their language teachers in the classrooms. In the urban set up there is a mushroom
growth of matriculation schools leading to a dearth of competent teachers. Naturally the predicament of the schools in urban areas becomes similar to that of the matriculation schools in the rural areas.

Moreover, at the higher secondary level the teaching of subjects is more examination-oriented. As students’ admission to professional or arts courses is based on the marks they obtain in the 12th standard public examination, prime importance is given for subjects like Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology relegating language studies to a secondary place with little or negligible attention provided for language teaching and development. In the arduous attempts to help their wards secure maximum marks, both the parents and teachers alike neglect their language study.

Even in rural areas, parents who are financially sound and who can afford to, send their children to nearby urban schools. In urban areas, parents usually prefer English medium schools for various reasons like:

1. Better student/staff ratio to provide individual attention and care
2. More competent teachers than at Government schools
3. Good exposure to more curricular and co-curricular activities
4. Good conducive atmosphere for learning
5. Ample opportunities for holistic development
6. Prestige issue

Due to aforementioned reasons parents opt for English medium schools run by private managements and the data provided in the table evinces the growing interest in preferring English medium schools to vernacular
medium schools. Yet it is a million dollar question whether all or at least some of their hopes are realized in the English medium schools.

Though the major chunk of students were from the matriculation schools where the medium of instruction was English, the students did not possess a repertoire of a minimum of 3000 word families in English, most needed for academic study. The reason that could be attributed for this is that although English is the medium of instruction in many schools, it is hardly used for instructional or communicative purposes. This in turn leads to:

1. Minimal exposure to the language
2. General apathy towards the language and
3. An inherent impulse to belong to a group which predominantly uses the vernacular.

The language proficiency of the students from the Anglo Indian schools and CBSE board were better than that of students from GS and MS.

The language proficiency of the students in English is restricted since their experience of English has been confined to only a very small set of social domains with a limited number of speech functions in addition to their meager classroom encounters with the language. Hence, it should be borne in mind that exposure to a rich variety of linguistic and socio-cultural material with its focus on what to say, when and how is of paramount importance in second language learning.
5.4.3 Gender Variation

"A distinction is often made between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’. The former constitutes a biological distinction, while the latter is a social one. A number of sociolinguistics currently prefer the term ‘gender’ because it places the emphasis on the social construction of ‘male’ and ‘female’ " (Rod Ellis, 1994, p 202). For discussion in this study, the term gender is used. The differences that exist between the men and women in the learning procedures, attitudes and outcome of learning had been analysed and elucidated.

Studies (Penelope Eckert, 1997) indicate that the women have more positive attitudes to learning an L2 than men. There is marked difference in the way both confront the task of L2 learning. Men use the opportunities to interact to produce more output, whereas women use it to obtain more input. Clearer evidence for sex differences comes from self-report studies of the strategies learner use. Men reported using translation strategies more than women, while the women reported monitoring their comprehension more.

Women always outsmart men in the use of standard language forms. They are more sensitive to new forms and incorporate them, whenever possible, during the process of communication. Men, on the other hand, are less sensitive to new forms to the extent that they are less likely to notice them. This suggests that women might be better at L2 learning than men. Since they are likely to be more open to new linguistic forms, women learners generally perform better than men. This is true, even in the case of the present study where the girl students scored significantly higher than the boys on all the tests and the results were significant.
Of the total 209 informants, 115 were boys and 94 were girls. Among the 115 boys, 57 were from rural background and 58 from urban background. Of the 57 from rural areas only 18 had their schooling in government schools and 39 were from matriculation schools. In the urban background the majority of the boys (52) studied in Matriculation Schools, 5 in CBSE Schools and 1 in Anglo Indian school.

**Table 5.3 Gender Variation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Schools</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBSE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 94 girls, 43 hailed from rural background and 51 from urban background. The number of girls from Government schools and Matriculation Schools were almost the same with 20 from Government schools and 23 from Matriculation schools. It is interesting to see that the number of girls studying in Matriculation schools in the urban areas is double that of girls from matriculation schools in rural area. There were 3 girls who have had their schooling in CBSE Schools and 2 from Anglo Indian Schools.

It is quite heartening to see from the table that more number of girls are being admitted into Engineering colleges. There is only a meagre
difference of 21 between the number of male and female students. This
difference is in existence because the sample selected is inclusive of students
from Mechanical Engineering stream which is opted by only very few girls.
In all other streams usually the number of girl students is equal to that of
boys or sometimes more than that of the boys. This brings to limelight the
fact that times are changing and there is a welcome change in the attitude of
parents in not shying away from educating their girl children. In fact, the
number of parents who do not mind sending their girl children abroad for
higher studies is on the increase. Parents seem to have realised the increasing
need to educate the girl child and do not hesitate to send them for higher
education out of their hometown is slowly loosing grounds.

In addition to this, performance of the girls was better than the boys in
the case of vocabulary learning. The girls also adopt more strategies to
improve their language. This is in tandem with the overall performance of
the girls in education. It is also found that the reading habit of girls is better
than that of the boys. This could probably be because they do not
concentrate much on the extracurricular activities and spend less time in
outdoor activities. On the one hand, this deprives them of the world
knowledge, yet on the other hand it provides them with enough time for
indulging in reading which enables them to aggrandize their vocabulary
thereby helping them improve their language.

The social status of women in our society is less secure than that of
men and subordinate to that of men. Deprived of access to real power, girls
assert their identities through language which tells us why women are more
elaborate in answering while men answer crisply and concisely, to the point.
Linguistic differences between men and women can appear at various levels especially in the choice of lexical terms.

One obvious explanation for females' greater success in L2 learning in classroom settings is that they generally have more positive attitudes. This, in turn, may reflect their employment expectations. The girls may perceive a foreign language as having significant vocational value for them, whereas boys do not. These beliefs may have been derived from the students' parents.

Gender is, of course, likely to interact with other variables in determining L2 proficiency. It will not always be the case, therefore, that females outperform males. Once men enter into the business world they seem to attain higher levels of proficiency in L2 English than women because of the nature of their jobs which bring them into contact with the majority English-speaking group, while women are often 'enclosed in the home'. Yet this scenario has also been undergoing a tremendous change with more women going in for higher education and presenting a tough fight to their counterparts in the job market. Sex interacts with such factors as age, ethnicity and, in particular, social class.

5.4.4 Socioeconomic Variation

An individual's social class is determined by means of taking into account his/her income, level of education and occupation. It is customary to distinguish four groups, lower class, working class, lower middle class, and upper middle class. There is evidence of relationship between social class and L2 achievement with a strong correlation between socio-economic status
and achievement. Children from middle class homes regularly outperformed those from lower – and working class homes. There were also class-related difference in the learners’ attitudes.

The learners can be divided into an ‘advantaged’ and a disadvantaged group on the basis of socio-economic status. Children from lower socio-economic groups are less successful educationally than those from higher groups. Middle class children achieve higher levels of L2 proficiency and exhibit more positive attitudes during formal language learning. It is important to recognize, however, that it is not socio-economic class per se that produces these effects, but rather the experiences of the world which members of the different social classes are likely to have. More than the learning experience of the children in the classroom setting it is the contrasting life experiences which contribute to the differences in levels of achievement. “It is ‘difference’ and not ‘deficit’ that is at the root of many of the language problems that children face at school” (Rod Ellis, 1994, p 206).

The achievement gap between students of differing socioeconomic levels is one of the most persistent and frustrating problems that educators confront. Researchers have examined this problem extensively and have identified limited vocabulary as an important factor in the underachievement of children from economically disadvantaged homes. This problem begins early in childhood and becomes increasingly evident over time.

5.4.4.1 Parents’ Education

The children also suffer from a setback in the language development because of the lack of parent’s education which in turn leads to hardly any
use of the target language in their homes. The succeeding analysis moves over to find out how the parents’ educational level has significance on the language skills of the students.

**Table 5.4 Parent’s Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th></th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.27</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.96</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSc</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>21.53</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>23.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UG</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>32.54</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>24.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17.70</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A casual glance at the table reveals the fact that the fathers are more educated than the mothers. Parents’ reluctance in educating a girl child in the earlier generation is evinced through this. Among the father’s 50% had stopped their studies at the school level. They had dropped out of school at HS (16.27%), after 10th (11.96%) or after completion of HSc (21.53%). There were 32.545 of them who had completed UG degree and 17.7% who had pursued PG courses, both of which formed a total of 50%. The reasons for not completing the UG degree could be:

1. Financial crunch
2. Family circumstances
3. Opting to become an entrepreneur
4. Assisting father in family businesses
Whatever the reason may be, the determination of these fathers to provide for their children the education that they had been denied is seen in their choice of professional courses for their children.

The mothers as expected did seem to have a greater setback in learning. There were only 22.97% mothers who had been to High School, 21.05% who had completed 10th and 23.45% who had taken up the +2 examinations. Undergraduates were 24.40% and the post graduates were even less with just 8.13%. The unwarranted bias of the parents in not educating the girl child is testified here. It is a welcome sign that at least in this generation this attitude is undergoing a dramatic change. Parents are more than interested in equipping their girl child mentally and physically to face the challenges of life through formal education.

Among the parents, 49.76% of the fathers and 67.47% mothers are non-graduates which indicate that about half the number of students taken for the study are first generation learners. First generation manifests that parents are non-degree holders and the informants belong to the first generation to get a degree whereas the second generation refers to the informants being the second generation in their family to get a degree as parents are degree holders. Having understood the importance of English language the second generation learners are made to opt for English medium schools. The ignorance of the value of English language and the frustration arising out of the inability to teach their children has prompted the first generation learners to seek admission for their children in the government schools. Yet some of these parents have realized the importance of language and have got their children admitted into Matriculation schools.
The parents are at times forced to educate their children in vernacular medium schools due to many socio-economic constraints such as low income, high fee structure in private schools and the non-availability of management schools in their hamlets. Some of the non-graduate parents might have selected the government schools for educating their children as it was more economical. All these affirm that the level of the education of parents exerts a greater influence in the selection of schools for educating their children which might help or mar their progress in the vocabulary learning. The study also revealed that the parents of the informants who were educationally low and whose movements are mostly parallel to their class of people, often adopt Tamil in the family domain as well as during their interaction elsewhere.

5.4.4.2 Parents Who Can Speak in English

The lack of opportunity to use English at home is yet another reason for poor language development pointing towards an insufficient mental lexicon. Hence, an analysis was made to find out if one or both parents could speak in English.

**Table 5.5 Parents Who Can Speak in English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.57</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 5.4, it is quite evident that almost half the students' parents do not know to speak in English and only in the case of 26.79 %, both
parents could speak in English. Taken individually, only 20.57% fathers and 7.66% mothers could speak in English. This provides a greater setback for the students for the opportunity to converse in English at home is too minimal. If either one or both the parents could speak in English it would create a congenial atmosphere at home for the child to be exposed to the language and learn it in the most natural way. The learning of the language of course commences with listening, imitating and learning the use of words.

5.4.4.3 Languages Used for Communication

After checking out the capabilities of the parents English language use, the researcher proceeded to analyse what was the language that was used for communication at home and at college.

Table 5.6 Languages Used for Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages used</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Tamil</th>
<th>English &amp; Tamil</th>
<th>Other Languages</th>
<th>English &amp; Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During Class hrs</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Home</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data collected substantiates the use of only Tamil and other southern regional languages at home. Though there were 17.7% fathers and 8.13% mothers who were post graduates and 26.79% parents who could speak in English it was only 0.9% students who spoke in English and 4.30% who used English and vernacular languages at home. This means that only 5% of the students do get to speak in English at home which speaks volumes.
for the students lack of sufficient vocabulary in English. Even at the college it was only 39.71% who used only English to communicate. There were 36.365 students who never used English in classrooms for interacting with either their teachers or with their classmates. As a result, the children are getting limited exposure in listening as well as expressing themselves in English. This linguistic environment acts as a negative force in acquiring second language at the initial stages of childhood.

Further, it was observed that although some parents have wider movement in society and have acquired more knowledge in English it is only rarely they use English at home or elsewhere. Their children often pick up English only at the lexical level. As a result both these categories of students are not different from each other.

The next category of students whose parental education is more have a wider movement in society which is parallel to their economic position and status have better opportunities to acquire the second language even at the initial stages of their childhood. The study further reveals that when all these students reach the college level of education, they are exposed only to English. At this point of time there are two factors which affect their vocabulary enhancement. They are psychological and situational factors.

5.4.5 Psychological factors

The students who come from socially and economically backward areas and with incipient knowledge in English experience a psychological set back even at the initial stages of learning the language. This further increases when the teaching methodology also fails to contribute
significantly for improving their lexical knowledge. The teaching methodology generally adopted at the college level is lecture method. In other words, very little time is allocated for interactive communication among the students or between the student and the teacher. In addition to this, the sentence structure and the lexical items used during the lectures are complex and technical in nature. This has a considerable deviation when compared to the teaching technique adopted in schools.

As a result of these, the students have difficulty in comprehending the lectures. Because of the use of many new words especially technical terminology the students have difficulty in guessing the meaning in relation to its context. Due to this situation, at the initial stage itself the students, especially those who come from the first category mentioned earlier develop certain complexities as far as the use of English is concerned. This sort of initial set back continues in their personality, which further leads to total incompetence. The reason for this can be traced to the total teaching and learning situation in the Indian context which is more concerned with syllabus, teaching methodology and evaluation system.

When learners have negative attitudes towards both their own culture and that of the target language, semilingualism may result. That is the learners may fail to develop full proficiency in their language. A socially based motivation involving a ‘willingness to be valued members of the (second) language community’ results in high levels of L2 proficiency. Learners’ attitudes also affect language attrition.

Motivation is an example of a factor that is clearly variable. The strength of an individual learner’s motivation can change over time and is
influenced by external factors. There is widespread recognition that motivation is of great importance for successful L2 acquisition. It was observed from the data obtained from the questionnaire that 90.43% understood the need for improving vocabulary and out of them, 71.77% students claimed that they had been taking efforts to improve their lexical knowledge by reading, watching English movies and English news on the television, playing word games like scrabble, listening to English music, using dictionaries, using language laboratory and dictionaries.

5.4.6 Situational factors

Children with larger vocabularies find reading easier, read more widely, and do better in school. Conversely, children who enter school with limited vocabulary find reading difficult, resist reading, learn fewer words, and consequently fall further behind. Children with limited vocabulary lose ground each year they are in school. By the time they graduate from high school, these students know only one-fourth as many words as their academically successful peers. Students disinterest in any kind of reading at the undergraduate level testifies this.

5.4.6.1 Reading variation

There is a broad consensus among researchers that students who attend low-performing schools need to learn more vocabulary and that vocabulary is highly correlated with reading comprehension. Does this correlation suggest that strengthening vocabulary instruction will improve the reading comprehension of disadvantaged children? The research does not provide a definitive answer to this question. The vocabulary literature
suggests that the relationship between vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension is complex, and the results of vocabulary interventions are inconsistent in terms of improving reading comprehension. Some studies appear to support a causal relationship between vocabulary instruction and reading comprehension achievement.

Table 5.7 Reading Habit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Habit</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Students who read</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>22.49</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>73.68</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the questionnaire answered by the students it is quite evident that only 22.49% do read frequently. The majority of the students (73.68%) have claimed to read only occasionally and 3.82% students admitted that they have not cultivated any reading habit. Among those who claimed to do any reading, it was found that 16.27% students read books /magazine only in their mother tongue. 24.88% read in English and 58.85% students read in both the languages. On inquiry into how many books they do read per month, it was seen that more than 50% of the students (57.89%) read only less than two books per month, 24.40% read two books and 14.35% students read more than two books. It was also noticed that among those who had inculcated the reading habits, 40.67% students preferred to read only newspapers, 16.27% preferred to read only magazines, 6.70% students preferred only novels 1.44% had their preference in reading only short stories. 30.14% students had exhibited their interest in reading newspapers along with one or the other of the types of books mentioned.
Some students preferred to read only newspapers because they wanted to garner information along with improving their vocabulary. There were others who preferred to read novels since they thought that as they languish in the enjoyment of reading novels they may be able to enhance their vocabulary. There were others who thought it was a sheer waste of time to read novels. Nevertheless, even they wanted to do some reading in English and so indulged in reading magazines wherein they would be able to gather snippets of information. The length of articles and easy style adopted in the articles demands less time and effort from the students. So they prefer magazines.

This evinces beyond doubt that their reading habits are poor and this is directly proportional to their inadequate vocabulary for learning and use.

5.4.7 Ethnic identity

There is a general consensus that ethnic identity can extract a profound influence on L2 learning. This influence can take three possible forms, corresponding to normative, psychological, and socio-structural views of the relationships. A key concept there is that of the distance between the cultures of the native and the target languages. The idea being that the more distant the two cultures are, the more difficult the L2 learning is and, therefore, the lower the achievement levels. A socio-psychological view of the relationship between ethnic identity and L2 proficiency emphasizes the role of attitudes. The attitudes that learners hold towards the learning of a particular L2 reflect the intersection of their views about their own ethnic identity and those about the target-language culture. These views will influence both L1 and L2 learning.
5.5 Implications and Conclusion

The compelling need to strengthen the educational outcomes of disadvantaged children and the discrepant outcomes of vocabulary studies suggest that a different approach to the problem of limited vocabulary and poor reading comprehension may be warranted. Aspects of cognitive strategy research could be scrutinized in an attempt to identify successful methods of improving reading comprehension that may be adapted and applied to vocabulary instruction.

Cognitive theorists conceptualize learning as a series of information-processing tasks that the learner regulates through application of cognitive strategies. Mayer (1981) provided a conceptual framework for cognitive strategy research, suggesting that learning is dependent on verbal knowledge (knowledge about something), procedural knowledge (how to solve the problem), and a plan of attack (a strategy to achieve the goal).

While L2 learning is often considered as a problem in the education of the lower-status people, it is seen as a mark of distinction in higher-status people. Bilingualism by choice mostly takes place outside the main educational contexts of L2 teaching and varies immensely according to the parents’ wishes.

The teacher in a classroom can neither alter nor change any of the variables mentioned earlier. Age, aptitude, intelligence and most areas of personality are unalterable factors. But the teachers can make a world of difference by altering what they can by making scrupulous efforts to recognize the difference between the students. At a superficial level the
teacher has to cater to the needs of the class as a whole by taking into consideration their age and motivating them and at a much deeper level should be able to recognize the individual differences and provide them ample opportunities to grow and blossom in their own way. This is called ‘ambiguous teaching’ by Vivian Cook (2001) which refers to same teaching taken in different ways by different students. Complete individualization or providing a course exclusive to a particular student is not practical in a classroom. For class teaching the aspects in which students are different have to be balanced against those that they share. Much L2 learning is common ground whatever the individual differences between learners may be.

Thus there exist social categories, structures, divisions, attitudes and identities which are marked, encoded or expressed in language use. It is only by constant interaction in the sociocultural situation can the language skills be developed to the fullest extent. This provides a strong foundation for the attainment of other facets of language learning namely reading and writing. The linguistic implications of these facets can be summarised as noted below.

The first facet listening, refers to decoding of speech sounds which represent the thought of the person who speaks. Speaking implies encoding of one’s thoughts into speech sounds for oral communication. Reading alludes to decoding of written text into ideas which represent the thought of the writer. Writing is the facet which involves the encoding of one’s thoughts into written text for communication.
There has been relatively little research which has investigated the effects of particular social factors on L2 proficiency. However, a few studies relating to key sociolinguistics variables such as age, sex, social class, ethnic membership have been carried out. The general findings are that younger learners do better than older learners, girls have outperformed boys, middleclass learners achieve a higher level of academic language proficiency than working class learners, and learners from an ethnic group that is culturally similar to the target language group tend to be more successful than learners from an ethnic group that is culturally distant (Rod Ellis, 1994, p 25).