Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

2.1 The need for theory and theoretical framework

All good research begins and ends with theory. A primary purpose of research is to test theory using deduction and experimentation; or generate theory using induction or abduction and naturalistic-based designs. DePoy and Gitlin (1998) argue that the researcher must have a theoretical framework to conduct adequate research1. Thinking and action processes are equally important parts of research. The thinking processes that are critical to research are the set of human ideas that can be organized to understand human experience and phenomena. These ideas are theories or parts of theories. Theory frames how we ask, look at, and answer questions. Theory provides conceptual clarity and the capacity to connect new knowledge that is obtained through data collection actions to the vast body of knowledge to which it is relevant. Without theory, we cannot have conceptual direction. Data that are derived without being conceptually embedded in theoretical contexts do not advance our understanding of human experience. As simply stated by Neuman, “...theory helps a researcher see the forest instead of just a single tree.”2

2.2 Definitions and Theoretical Frameworks

The discourse of second language learning can be dated back to the ancient times many centuries back. But the genuine concern to address the basic questions started only in the 1960s when the scholars in the field started formulating theories and models. The entire discourse of second language acquisition can be categorised as primarily based on linguistic, psychological and social frameworks. Although these perspectives can be treated separately, yet there are extensive interrelations among them. Prior to getting deeper into the various categories, it becomes necessary to define the common terms used in the discourse.
2.2.1 Second Language Acquisition Studies

This study, “A Critical Study of the Cross-linguistic Influences on Learning English in the Regional Medium Schools in Assam”, comes under the domain of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Studies. According to Saville-Troike Second Language Acquisition refers to “the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children, and to the process of learning that language” (Saville-Troike, 2010).

First Language and Second Languages

In the first few years of life, every normal child acquires a language. This is the child’s first language. Wolfgang Klein calls this the child’s ‘native tongue’. Usually, a child is able to communicate freely in the native language by the time he/she goes to school. A language is ‘first’, if “no other language was acquired before” (Klein, 1990). Otherwise, this language becomes second. The acquisition of this first language occurs first or before any other language is acquired by the child. Therefore, the first language acquisition is ‘primary’, both in terms of sequence and importance. The first language is the language that makes a child a social being. This language gives the speaker the basic social, ethnic or linguistic identity.

The first language can be referred with other terms like native language, primary language, mother tongue, and others. These terms can be clubbed under the same roof of first language or L1. But, even though these set of terms are roughly the synonyms of each other, yet they have some conceptual differences among them. These distinctions are not very clear and for the purpose of second language studies, the important features that these “shades of L1 share are that they are assumed to be languages which are acquired during childhood-normally beginning before the age of about three years—and that they are learned as part of growing up among people who speak them” (Saville-Troike, 2010).

A second language is the language which is acquired after the acquisition of the first language. The second language can be learned or acquired subsequently with the learning of the first language as young children or it can be learned in a formal setting, both as children or as adults. In its general sense, the second language is any language
that is acquired after the acquisition of the first language. But in a more specific sense, a second language refers to an additional language which is learned within a context where it is societally dominant and needed for education, employment, trade, and other basic purposes. The utility purpose of the second language in a society makes its presence very relevant. This language can be actually the third or the fourth language learned by the learner but it is still called the second language (or L2) because it is “typically an official or societally dominant language needed for education, employment, and other basic purposes. It is often acquired by minority group members or immigrants who speak another language natively” (Saville-Troike, 2010:4). For instance, the members of the Assamese language community use English as a second language in various fields because of its variegated utility, even though their native language is Assamese. The term second language can be used in several restricted senses also. The distinctions of the various terminological references for the rubric of second language are given below-

- **Target Language:** the target language is that language which is the aim or goal of learning of any learner; in this case, the second language learner.

- **Foreign Language:** this language is not widely used in the learners’ immediate social context which might be used for future travel or other cross-cultural communication situations, or studied as a curricular requirement or elective in school. It has no immediate or necessary practical application.

- **Auxiliary Language:** This language is one which learners need to know for some official functions in their immediate political setting. Learners may need this language for purposes of wider communication.

- **Library Language:** This language functions primarily as a tool for further learning through reading. In a clearer sense, when books or journals in a desired field of study are not commonly published in the learners’ native tongue.

- **Language for Specific Purposes:** This is used for a restricted or highly specialized function. Generally, second languages are designated for specific purposes. The learning of these languages typically focuses only on a narrow set of occupation-specific uses and functions. Some prominent areas are: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), French for Hotel Management, English
2.2.2 Scope of Second Language Acquisition

The scope of second language acquisition studies is a wide area with new concepts being added into its fold every year. But for the sake of this study, some major concepts would be analysed. They are-

- Informal L2 learning and formal L2 learning.
- Bilingualism

Informal and Formal L2 learning

Wolfgang Klein opines that a second language can be acquired in a number of ways, at “any age, for different purposes, and to varying degrees” (Klein, 1990). Traditionally, a fundamental distinction has been made between tutored and untutored (spontaneous) language learning. Klein calls this distinction as spontaneous and guided language acquisition. Spontaneous learning or informal second language acquisition refers to the “acquisition of a second language in everyday communication, in a natural fashion, free from systematic guidance” (Klein, 2010). The important criterion of this definition is that informal second language learning takes place in naturalistic contexts. To cite an example, we quote Muriel Saville-Troike. Informal learning happens “when a child from Japan is brought to the US and ‘picks up’ English in the course of playing and attending school with native English-speaking children without any specialized language instruction” (Saville-Troike, 2010). From the context of Assam, when immigrant workers from Bihar comes to Assam seeking livelihood, they ‘pick up’ Assamese as a result of interacting with native Assamese speakers or with co-workers who speak Assamese as a second language. They do not attend any specialized language instruction but learn spontaneously and informally.

Formal second language learning takes place in classrooms. Klein distinguishes between the terms ‘learning’ and ‘acquisition’. He refers to ‘learning’ as guided language acquisition and uses the term ‘acquisition’ to refer to spontaneous learning. Guided language acquisition or learning involves the process of specialized language instructions given to learners in a classroom or a controlled environment. It is generally done in a formal setting. Saville-Troike says that formal second language learning
occurs “when a high school student in England takes a class in French” (Saville-Troike, 2010).

For the purpose of this study, the term second language acquisition will be used interchangeably with second language learning. The second language here is English which is studied in the formal setting of a school classroom.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism refers to the ability to use two languages. Klein talks about two types of bilingualism: Compound and coordinate bilingualism.

**Compound bilingualism** means that two languages are being “learned in parallel” (Klein, 1990). However different any two language systems are, they have some features in common. The users may employ the same categories, many of their words may have equivalents in the other language, they may have similar syntactic rules, or some other similar feature. Therefore, according to Klein, it is conceivable that the learner might have developed one system with a number of variable components between which the learner may switch at will. In the case of vocabulary, the learner gets to know that the notion ‘chair’ may have two (or more) phonological realizations (in the two languages that have been learnt). The learner, when speaking, chooses that realization which fits the communicative situation. Compound bilingualism is also referred to as bilingual first language acquisition.

**Coordinate bilingualism** occurs when a bilingual person, in addition to a first language, acquires another as a second language. In this kind of bilingualism, Klein believes that initially one language system develops and subsequently, the learner builds up another system. After both the language systems are developed the learner operates the two systems in parallel. If one of the two languages learnt by the learner is dominant, it can be inferred that much of the person’s language processing is “effected” in the dominant language, and the other language is used only at a superficial level of production or comprehension.

U. Weinreich (1953) was the first to formulate this distinction and he identified three kinds of bilingualism with reference to the structuring of the vocabulary. The three kinds of bilingualism are: Compound bilingualism, coordinate bilingualism and
subordinate bilingualism. This distinction was further revised by Ervin and Osgood (1954) and it remained influential for the next twenty years. Ervin and Osgood incorporated Weinreich’s third type of bilingualism (subordinate bilingualism) into the coordinate type of bilingualism. The two types of bilingualism get distinguished because of the way the languages are acquired. According to Ervin and Osgood, coordinate bilingualism emerges when the two languages are acquired in different contexts, for example, one at home and the other at school.

Social Psychologist Lambert (1974), in his researches in the complex and sensitive area of bilingualism and biculturalism, differentiated between additive and subtractive bilingualism. These views are very strong even today and we find several inputs of it in Gardner’s (2002) work even in the present times. Considering the social dimensions of language learning, ethnic category also plays a role in motivating learners to learn a second language. Perceptions prevail that members of one ethnic category are more, or less, privileged than another and this is “determined in large part by which group is politically and economically dominant in a multiethnic society, which is also often the one that has majority status” (Saville-Troike, 2010). The two types of bilingualism that result from this are additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism.

**Additive Bilingualism**

It is the result of second language acquisition in social contexts where members of a dominant group learn the language of a minority or subordinate group without threat to their L1 competence or to their ethnic identity.

**Subtractive Bilingualism**

It is the result of second language acquisition in social contexts where members of a subordinate or minority group learn the dominant language as L2. These learners are always under the threat that they are likely to experience some loss of ethnic identity and attrition of L1 skills. The threat is more lurking when the learners are children.

**2.2.3 Cross-linguistic Influences and Transfer Studies**

When a learner starts learning a second language, he already has a command
over his first language to some extent. A second language learner, at ‘all points of his learning career “has a language”’ (Corder, 1981, 1987). Hence, the beginning stages of learning a second language are characterized by a good deal of interlingual transfer from the native language or what we can call interference. In these early stages, before the system of second language is familiar, the native language is the only linguistic system in previous experience upon which the learner can draw. (Brown, 1987:177)

We can define the cross-linguistic influences as the influences resulting from the similarities and the differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired. In any language contact situation, we find several cross-linguistic similarities and differences. This rubric of cross-linguistic influences was initially studied under the heading ‘language transfer’ and the term was conceived by S. Pit Corder. But it was Pit Corder again who appealed for another term and initiated the terminology ‘cross-linguistic influences’. Presently, the latter term is used as an umbrella term which accommodates the concept of ‘language transfer’.

Cross-linguistic influences (CLI) are those features that are evident in the production of the target language in the process of learning a second language. In this study “A Critical Study of the Cross-linguistic Influences on Learning English”, the target language is obviously English, which is also the major second language in Assam. These cross-linguistic influences vary from place to place in learning English.

CLIs are more evident when the native language of the learner is dominant in the language setting of the particular region. At this point the notion of interference seems applicable, especially phonetic inaccuracies resembling sounds in the learner’s native language. When the differences between the previously learned language and the target language are relatively few, the influence of the native language or the interferences act tremendously advantageous.

Knowledge of a single native language is the most typical basis for substratum transfer. (Terence Odlin, 1989, 2003).

2.2.4 Factors that cause cross-linguistic influences:

In a multilingual society, language contact situations arise whenever there is a meeting of speakers who does not have a common language, yet there is the necessity
to communicate. When the communicative needs of the people stretch beyond the achievement of gestures and paralinguistic signals, the learning of a second language becomes necessary. Languages learnt in contact situations generally show some features as listed below. These features could be regarded as the preconditions that facilitate CLIs to occur.

a) Language mixing in a plurilingual society—

In a multilingual society one very common feature is the mixing of languages in various contexts and situations. The merging of forms or functions of two or more languages in any verbal communication is known as language mixing. Language mixing occurs in various forms.

- Native language influence is one form of mixing. It refers to the influence of the native language on the target language that result from the similarities and differences of the two. We are going to discuss this aspect in detail in the next point.
- Borrowing is another form of language mixing in which different languages may become mixed up with each other. Borrowing involves mixing of the linguistic systems themselves.8
- Code-switching—it is a systematic interchange of words, phrases, or sentences taken from two or more languages. Code-switching is the inevitable consequence of bilingualism. Anyone who speaks more than one language chooses between them according to the need of the circumstance.

b) Native language influence

Among the various reasons sorted out, the native language influence is the most acceptable factor that facilitates cross-linguistic influences. A second language learner generally seems to follow the norms of what Wolfgang Klein calls “coordinate bilingualism”.9 This second language learner, who already has the knowledge of a first language with him and is in the process of acquiring another language, “initially develops one system.” “Subsequently he builds up another system and can then operate the two in parallel.” W. Klein further says, “If one of the two languages is dominant, we can infer that much of the person’s language processing is effected in the dominant
language...". This dominant language is most often the native language of the learner.
What Klein calls “processing...in the dominant language”, Krashen (1983:148) calls
it the “result of falling back on old knowledge, the L1 rule, when new knowledge...is
lacking.” From the various researches conducted by scholars it becomes clearly
evident that the knowledge of the native language greatly influences the learning of
the second language.

Throughout his book *Language Transfer*, Terence Odlin focuses on situations
in which influence from the native language has important consequences for the
acquisition of a second language. We can assert about the learners’ strategy of falling
back on native language knowledge when we deal with the concept of interlanguage.
H. Douglas Brown believes that the beginning stages of learning a second language
are characterized by a “good deal of interlingual transfer from the native language”.

In this study we are going to deal specifically with this issue of native language
influence on learning English by the learners. Assamese being the dominant language
of the region, we consider it the native language of the learners studying in the
Assamese medium schools in Assam. The cross-linguistic influences that are
commonly seen among the learners and which occur due to the learner’s previous
knowledge of Assamese would be discussed later.

c) Formation of pidgins and creoles

Another way of language varieties getting mixed is the process of creating a
new variety out of the two (or more) existing ones. This process of ‘variety synthesis’
may take a number of different forms of which the most important is the process of
pidginisation, whereby Pidgins are formed. Odlin defines pidgin as a new language
that develops as a result of language contact between speakers of different languages.
Pidgins typically develop among speakers who need to talk about trade, work, and so
forth, but who are unable to learn the native language of their interlocutors. Since the
reason for wanting to communicate with members of the communities is often trade,
pidgins are generally known as trade languages, even though pidgins are known to be
used to perform other functions.

Pidgins usually show a great deal of structural simplification and sometimes a
great deal of substratum transfer.

A pidgin which has acquired native speakers is called a Creole and the process whereby a pidgin turns into Creole is called creolisation. The English based pidgin of Papua New Guinea, Tok Pisin has recently gone through the process of creolisation attaining native speakers. Here in Assam we have Saadri, a Creole spoken by the tea community of Assam, which has also attained several generations of native speakers.

Even though the pidgins are a precondition that can facilitate the occurrence of the cross-linguistic influences, yet, this particular study shall keep this factor out of its scope. The reason behind is, this study intends to study the cross-linguistic influences only from Assamese.

d) Borrowing and Substratum transfer:

Weinreich (1953/1968) believes that the effects of cross-linguistic influence are not monolithic but instead vary considerably according to the social context of the language contact situation. The elicitation of the terms Borrowing and Substratum transfer would help in distinguishing these effects.

Borrowing transfer refers to the influence a second language has on a previously acquired language. This previously acquired language is typically one’s native language. Dyirbal is an aboriginal language spoken in northeastern Australia. This language has undergone considerable change from the traditional norms as a result of the younger aborigines’ exposure to English.

Borrowing transfer is commonly seen at the lexical level because due to the onset of strong cultural influences from speakers of the foreign language or the second language, the speakers of the native language soak in the vocabulary of the same. The influential group is often either a speech community with larger number of speakers or with greater prestige or more political power. In such cases, words associated with the government, the legal system, the schools, the technology, and the commercial products make their way into the previously acquired language. Sometimes massive lexical borrowing may supplant much of the vocabulary of everyday living of the native language. For instance, in case of the Young People’s Dyirbal, the younger Dyirbal speaking Aborigines were not always aware of the traditional words to describe
activities such as cooking and would therefore employ English words instead. In the case of Assamese vocabulary also, many English words have supplanted the Assamese ones like 'pen', 'school', 'cup', 'plate', 'bottle', 'sandal', 'frock' etc. This supplant is more pronounced in the legal, technological, banking, educational, medical and many other sectors in Assam.

Apart from lexical semantics, borrowing transfer results in a great deal of cross-linguistic syntactic influence as well.

**Substratum transfer:**

This type of cross-linguistic influence is commonly investigated in most studies of second language acquisition. Substratum transfer involves the influence of a source language on the acquisition of a target language. The source language typically happens to be the native language of the speaker and the target language is generally the "second" language regardless of how many languages the learner already knows. Substratum transfer manifests in a different way from the cross linguistic influences of borrowing transfer. Thomason (1981) suggests that the effects of substratum transfer are more evident in pronunciation. But Odlin believes that along with pronunciation substratum transfer effects are seen in syntax also. Many researchers believe that pronunciation is the most difficult aspect of a second language to master and so the influence of native language phonetics and phonology will be more pervasive than the influence of other language subsystems.

This study intends to find out the influence that the knowledge of the Assamese language exerts on the learners of English in the regional medium schools in Assam. As such, substratum transfer would be a very important aspect to be dealt with in detail in this study. Therefore, in this study, cross linguistic influence on learning English would essentially mean the influence of the source language Assamese on the target language English which is studied as the second language of the region.

e) The notion of interference

Another pre-condition that facilitates the occurrence of CLI is the notion of interference. In the description of some aspects of second language acquisition, the notion of interference seems applicable. The term interference is widely used to
describe aspects such as phonetic inaccuracies that resemble sounds in the learner’s native language. According to Terence Odlin the term interference implies what the term negative transfer implies. Negative transfer refers to the cross-linguistic influences resulting in errors, over-production, underproduction, miscomprehension, and other effects that constitute a divergence between the behaviour of native and non-native speakers of a language. There is an advantage in using the term negative transfer since there is the scope of contrasting it with the concept of positive transfer. Positive transfer refers to any facilitating effects on acquisition of a target language due to the influence of cross-linguistic similarities and which results in a convergence of behaviours of native and non-native speakers of a language.

f) Interlanguage of the learner

Second language learning is a creative process of constructing a system in which learners are consciously testing hypotheses about the target language from a number of possible sources of knowledge. These sources include limited knowledge of the target language itself, knowledge about the native language, knowledge about the communicative function of language, knowledge about language in general, and knowledge about life, human beings and the universe. The learners, in acting upon their environment, construct what to them is a legitimate system of language in its own right. This system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native language and the target languages is considered as the “interlanguage” of the second language learner. Larry Selinker (1972) first coined this term to express the linguistic development of the learner from the native language to the target language.

The very system of interlanguage almost guarantees that there would be cross-linguistic influences on the learning of the target language from the native language. S. Pit Corder (Oxford University Press, 1987: 67) says that the terms ‘interlanguage’ and ‘interlingua’ suggest that the learner’s language will show “systematic features both of the target language and of other languages he may know, most obviously his mother tongue.”

The second language learner has to go through various stages of interlanguage which H. Douglas Brown supporting S.Pit Corder’s model classifies into four stages—
1. The stage of random errors
2. The emergent stage
3. The systematic stage
4. The stabilization stage
All these stages would be discussed with error analysis.

2.2.5 Manifestation of the cross-linguistic influences (CLI).

Whenever a second language is learned in a multilingual setting, cross-linguistic influences would surely manifest in certain forms as either similarities or differences. These cross-linguistic similarities and differences produce a varied range of effects. These effects determine the impact of the CLI in learning the target language. They are as follows:¹⁵

1. Positive Transfer
2. Negative Transfer

1) Positive Transfer:

Positive Transfer refers to the facilitating effects on acquisition due to the influence of cross-linguistic similarities. Positive transfer results in a convergence of behaviours of native and non-native speakers of a language. The effects of positive transfer are determinable through comparisons of the success of groups with different native languages. Comparative studies have shown that similarities between native language and target language vocabulary can reduce the time needed to develop good reading comprehension (Odlin, 2003). Similarly, similarities between vowel systems can make the identification of vowel sounds easier. Similarities between writing systems can help learners make a good start in reading and writing in the target language. Similarities in syntactic structures can facilitate the acquisition of grammar.

2) Negative Transfer:

Negative transfer involves divergences from norms in the target language. The effects of negative transfer constitute a divergence between the behaviour of native and non-native speakers of a language. For this reason it is easy to identify them. The different types of cross-linguistic influences that arise due to negative transfer are as follows:
A) **Underproduction**: Underproduction is evident when learners produce very few or no examples of a target language structure. Sometimes learners sense that particular structures in the target language are very different from counterparts in the native language. In such a situation the learners produce very few or no examples of that structure. Often the examples that these learners produce result in comparatively few errors. But if the structure is more infrequent than it is in the language of native speakers, the infrequency constitutes a divergence from target language norms. One common form of underproduction related to language distance is **avoidance**.

B) **Overproduction**: Overproduction can be regarded as a by-product of underproduction. Sometimes avoidance causes overproduction. Example: Japanese learners of English in order to avoid relative clauses may violate norms of written prose in English by writing too many simple sentences. Similarly, overproduction is evident in the domain of discourse. For example, the use of apologies appears to be more frequent in American English than in Hebrew. Hence native speakers of English generally use apologies when using Hebrew more often than native speakers of Hebrew.

C) **Production Errors**: In speech and writing there are three types of errors especially likely to arise from CLIs:

i) **Substitutions**—they involve use of native language forms in the target language.

ii) **Calques**—they are errors that reflect very closely a native language structure. Calques are evident in idiomatic expressions and word-order errors.

iii) **Alteration of structures**: Hypercorrection is an instance involving alteration of structures. Hypercorrection is an inappropriate use of a form due to excessive concern over the use of another form. Example: Arabian speakers spelling ‘habit’ as ‘hapit’ as a reaction to substitutions of the letter ‘b’ for the letter ‘p’.

D) **Misinterpretation**: Native language structures can influence the interpretation of target language messages, and sometimes that influence leads to learners inferring something very different from what speakers of the target language would infer. Variant interpretations can arise from misinterpretations of target language sounds that become categorized in terms of native language phonology. Misinterpretations may also occur when native and target language word-order patterns differ and when
cultural assumptions differ.

2.3 How do we assess the cross-linguistic influences?

The cross-linguistic influences, when they appear in the language of the second language learners, need to be identified and assessed. To assess their relevance and validity we need to depend on certain hypotheses. Among the many hypotheses of second language learning two hypotheses draw our attention because of their relevance in our study. They are contrastive analysis hypothesis and error analysis.

2.3.1 Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is one of the major approaches to the study of second language acquisition. This approach involves predicting and explaining learner problems based on a comparison of L1 and L2. This comparison of L1 and L2 is done in order to determine the similarities and differences between the two languages. The approach of Contrastive Analysis was heavily influenced by Structuralism and Behaviourism because these were the main theories which were dominant in the spheres of linguistics and psychology in the 1940s and 1950s. The primary goal of Contrastive Analysis was paedagogical in nature which was “to increase efficiency in L2 teaching and testing” (Saville-Troike, 2010:34).

This approach was first initiated by Robert Lado in his *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957). This treatise managed to become the classic guide to this approach and is able to hold its position till date.

Contrastive Analysis was heavily influenced by both Structuralism and Behaviourism and as a result the focal points vary. From the Structural point of view, the focus of Contrastive Analysis is on the surface forms of both L1 and L2 systems. The description and comparison of the languages are done one level at a time. The phonology of the L1 and L2 are first contrasted, then morphology and then syntax. The lexical level gets relatively less attention and the discourse level gets even less. In the structural approach to Contrastive Analysis, structures come before meaning. Charles Fries 17, a leading figure in applied structural linguistics (especially L2 teaching) makes it very clear in his discourse: “In learning a new language ...the chief problem is not at first that of learning vocabulary items. It is, first, the mastery of the
sound system...It is, second, the mastery of the features of arrangement that constitute the structure of the language" (Fries, 1945:3).

Following the notions of Behaviourist psychology, we get a different focus for Contrastive Analysis. According to this school, the early proponents of Contrastive Analysis assumed that language acquisition essentially involves habit formation in a process of Stimulus-Response-Reinforcement (S-R-R). Learners respond to the stimulus. This stimulus is the linguistic input. The reinforcement strengthens the response. In other words, learners imitate and repeat the language that they hear, and when they are reinforced to produce that response, learning occurs.\(^{18}\)

Apart from the Structuralist and the Behaviourist notions, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis has another assumption. This assumption talks about transfer in learning. In the case of second language acquisition transfer means the transfer of elements acquired or habituated in L1 to the Target L2. There are two types of transfer: positive and negative. Transfer is called positive when the same structure is appropriate in both languages. Positive transfer is facilitating. Transfer is called negative when the L1 structure is inappropriately used in the L2. Negative transfer is also known as interference.

The process of Contrastive Analysis (CA) involves describing L1 and L2 at each level. A rough analysis is made among the comparable segments of the languages (L1 and target L2) for elements which are likely to cause problems for learners. This information thus obtained provides a rationale for constructing language lessons that focus on structures which are predicted to need most attention and practice. This information also helps in sequencing the L2 structures in order of difficulty.

Regarding the procedures involved in Contrastive Analysis, Randall Whitman (1970) talked about four different stages. The procedures involved in contrastive analysis are:

- **Description**: description of the grammars of the native and the target language.
- **Selection**: selection of certain forms like linguistic items, rules, structures, linguistic categories, etc., for contrast.
- **Contrast**: the mapping of one linguistic system over the other.
- **Prediction**: prediction of difficulty or error on the basis of the first three
procedures. The prediction can be arrived at through the formulation of a hierarchy of difficulty or through mere subjective applications of psychological and linguistic theory.

Lado in his work provided a hierarchy of difficulty in structures. Lado opines that:

- The easiest L2 structures are those that exist in L1 with the same form, meaning, and distribution and hence they are available for positive transfer. These structures are presumably the first to be acquired by a learner.

- In the next category comes that structure in L2 which has a form not occurring in L1. These structures needs to be learned but they are not likely to be very difficult if it has the same meaning and distribution as an equivalent in L1.

- The most difficult structures are those where there is partial overlap but not equivalence in form, meaning, and distribution. These structures are most likely to cause interference.

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis remained popular among the researchers of second language acquisition from the 1940s up to the 1960s. Gradually it lost its fervour because it was not adequate enough for the study of SLA in part. This is because the behaviourist learning theory to which the contrastive analysis hypothesis was affiliated cannot explain the logical problem of language learning which is addressing the question “how learners know more than they have heard or have been taught” (Saville-Troike, 2010: 37).

Another reason why the relevance of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis got reduced was that the analyses done by the CA hypothesis were not always validated by evidence from actual learner errors. At the empirical level, many of the L2 problems predicted by Contrastive Analysis do not emerge. Moreover, Contrastive Analysis does not account for many learner errors. Also, the much predicted positive transfer does not materialize.

The other shortcoming of the Contrastive Analysis is regarding its application in the teaching-learning scenario. The instructional materials produced according to this approach are language-specific and unsuitable for use with speakers of different native languages.
Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis stimulated the preparation of hundreds of comparative grammars. Its analytic procedures have been usefully applied to descriptive studies and to translation, including computer translation. To extend the scope of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, there has been a recent revival and revision of the Contrastive Analysis procedures. It includes contrasts of languages at more abstract levels and extension of its scope of analysis to the domains of cross-cultural communication and rhetoric.

To find a solution to the unanswered questions left by Contrastive Analysis researchers tried to find newer methods. This gave way to the Error Analysis approach, which we shall discuss later.

In this study, a contrastive analysis would be attempted on the tense systems of both English and Assamese. The aim of this study is not to contrast the first language Assamese with the second language or the target language English. This study also does not attempt to predict the areas of difficulty between Assamese and English. Hence, the contrastive analysis provided here does not get delve deeper into the various details of contrastive analysis.

### 2.3.2 Error Analysis and Interlanguage

In the learning of a second language, the concept of Error Analysis has become very relevant. The second language learners’ errors are a potential source to understand the processes of second language acquisition. This consequently helps in the planning of courses incorporating the psychology of second language learning.

Fundamentally, human learning is a process involving the making of mistakes. Language learning too is like any other form of human learning. Children, when they learn their first language, make endless mistakes from the adult grammatical language point of view (Brown, 1987). But many of these ‘mistakes’ are “logical in the linguistic system within which children operate”.

In the earlier studies done by researchers the learners’ errors were dismissed as a matter of trivial importance. But these errors were later considered as inevitable by-products of the process of learning a language. The process of second language learning is also a process that involves the making of errors.
The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis mainly stressed on the interfering effects of the L1 on the L2 learning. It claimed that second language is “primarily a process of acquiring whatever items are different from the first language.” This view of interference is considered narrow by researchers and critics as it ignored the interlingual effects of learning a second language. To study these interlingual effects of second language learning, researchers started adopting an approach to analyse the ‘transitional competence’ of the learners from their production data. This approach is the study of learners’ errors. Learners do make errors and it is possible to observe, analyze and classify their production errors to find out about the system operating within the learner.

The Hypothesis

The Error Analysis Hypothesis states that “a human infant is born with an innate predisposition to acquire language; that he must be exposed to language for the acquisition process to start; that he possesses an internal mechanism of unknown nature which enables him from the limited data available to him to construct a grammar of a particular language.”

When we consider the term ‘error’, we need to draw a distinction between the errors which are the product of chance circumstances and those which reveal his/her underlying knowledge of the of the language to date. We may call this his transitional competence. The errors which are product of chance circumstances can be termed as errors of performance and these errors are characteristically unsystematic. These unsystematic errors shall be referred to as mistakes henceforth. The other types of errors are the errors of competence. These errors are systematic and can be considered as errors in the true sense of the term. From these systematic errors we can reconstruct the learner’s knowledge of the language to date; in other words his transitional competence.

Mistakes are of little significance in the process of language learning. But the problem arises when we need to determine which is a mistake and which is an error made by a learner.
Significance of Learners' Errors

A learner's errors provide evidence of the system of the language that he is using or has learnt at a particular point in the course of his learning a second language. To fall into the category of systematic errors these errors must be repeated. This repetition indicates that the learner is using some system, although it might not be the right system yet. S.Pit Corder talks about a threefold significance of these errors.

- They tell the teacher how far has the learner progressed towards the goal and what remains for the learner to learn.
- These errors provide evidence to the researcher how language is learnt or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner employs in his/her discovery of the language.
- The errors are indispensable to the learner himself. This is because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn.

The making of errors is a strategy employed both by children acquiring the mother tongue and by those learning a second language.

Error Analysis (EA) as an approach to the study of second language acquisition is the first approach which includes an internal focus on learner's creative ability to construct language. EA is based on the description and analysis of learners' errors in L2. Because of this reason, it differs from Contrastive Analysis. Contrastive Analysis depends on the description and analysis of the idealized linguistic structures attributed to native speakers of L1 and L2. On the other hand, EA depends on actual learner errors. Hence, empirically, EA is more relevant.26

The paradigmatic shift of the SLA researchers from CA to EA is because of the shift of the primary focus from surface forms and patterns to underlying rules. They tried to explain acquisition from the point of view of Mentalism rather than from the point of view of Behaviourism (as in CA).27 One can largely attribute these shifts to the revolution in Linguistics which resulted from Chomsky's introduction of Transformational-Generative (TG) Grammar (1957, 1965). Chomsky claimed that "languages have only a relatively small number of essential rules which account for their basic sentence structures, plus a limited set of transformational rules which
According to him, the finite number of basic rules and transformations in any language accounts for an infinite number of possible grammatical utterances. To “know” a language was seen as a matter of knowing these rules rather than memorizing surface structures. Since speakers of a language can understand and produce millions of sentences they have never heard before, they cannot merely be imitating what they have heard others speak. They must be applying these underlying rules to create new constructions. As a result language came to be understood as “rule-governed behaviour”.

With significant influence from linguistics and psychology, the study of first language acquisition started adopting notions that certain inner forces interacting with the environment drive learning. Also the child is an active and creative participant in the process rather than a passive recipient of “language stimuli”. In the sphere of second language acquisition and learning also similar notions began to be applied.

In this state of affairs, S.Pit Corder’s article on “The Significance of Learners’ Errors” proved to be the most influential publication that launched Error Analysis as an approach. This approach called upon researchers in the field of applied linguistics to focus on L2 learners’ errors not as “bad habits” to be eradicated, but as sources of insight into the learning processes. Corder further claimed that learners’ errors provide evidence of

- the system of language which a learner is using at any particular point in the course of L2 development, and
- of the strategies or procedures the learner is using in his/her “discovery of the language”.

Learner errors provide a view into the learner’s mind. In the Error Analysis approach, learner language is viewed as a target of analysis which is potentially independent of L1 or L2. This state of learner language is seen as transitional competence on the path of second language acquisition. According to Corder, making of errors is significant because it is part of the learning process itself.

R. Ellis puts forth certain steps to analyze learner errors. These steps are given below:

(47)
Collection of a sample of learner language.

Identification of errors: It is the first step in the analysis. It requires determination of elements in the sample of learner language which deviate from the target L2 in some way or the other.\(^3^0\)

Description of errors: For the purpose of error analysis, errors are generally classified according to language level (phonological errors, morphological errors, syntactic errors, etc.), general linguistic category (eg. Auxiliary system, passive sentences, negative constructions, etc.) or according to some more specific linguistic elements (like articles, prepositions, verb forms, etc.)

Explanation of errors: This step tries to account for why an error was made. It is an important step in trying to understand the processes of SLA. Researchers have found out that two of the most likely causes of L2 errors are interlingual\(^3^1\) factors and intralingual\(^3^2\) factors. Interlingual factors result from negative transfer or interference from L1. Intralingual factors cannot be attributed to cross-linguistic influences.\(^3^3\)

Evaluation of errors: This step involves analysis of what effect the error has; how serious the error is, to what extent it affects intelligibility, or social acceptability.

Interlanguage

What S.Pit Corder calls ‘transitional competence’ is named by Nemser as ‘approximative systems’ and Selinker has coined the term ‘interlanguage’ for the same. Selinker’s term has gained the widest currency among applied linguists in recent years.

Larry Selinker introduced the term Interlanguage in the year 1972 to refer to the intermediate states (or interim grammars) of a learner’s language as it moves towards the target L2. The researchers like Selinker and others who followed this approach considered the development of the Interlanguage (IL) to be a creative process, driven by inner forces in interaction with environmental factors, and influenced both by L1 and by input from the target language.

An interlanguage has certain characteristics:

- Systematic: The IL of a learner, at any particular point or stage of development,
is governed by rules which constitute the learner's internal grammar. These rules can be discovered by analyzing the language that is used by the learner at that time; what the learner can produce and interpret correctly as well as errors that are made.

- Dynamic: The stages of interlanguage are never in static mode. The system of rules which learners have in their minds changes frequently. It is always in a state of flux, resulting in a succession of interim grammars. According to Selinker this 'change' cannot be seen as a steady progression along a continuum, but as a discontinuous progression “from stable plateau to stable plateau” (Selinker, 1992:226).34

- Variable: Learning a second language for communicative purposes requires knowledge and skills for using it appropriately, as well as knowing aspects of linguistic forms and how they are organized. From the social perspective of language learning, it can be said that L2 interpretation and production are influenced by contextual factors, how the nature of social interaction may facilitate or inhibit L2 acquisition, and how outcomes of learning may be determined by the broad ecological context of SLA. All these factors make the IL of a learner a variable component. Moreover, learners themselves are variable.

- Reduced system (in form and content): One characteristic feature of Interlanguage is the reduced form. The term reduced form refers to the less complex grammatical structures that typically occur in an IL compared to the target language.35 The characteristic of reduced function refers to the smaller range of communicative needs served typically by an IL (this happens when the learner is still in contact with members of the L1 speech community).

**Stages of Interlanguage development**

There are different ways to describe the progression of linguistic development that learners manifest as their attempts at production successively approximate the target language system. Learners vary tremendously in their acquisition of a second language and hence their stages of development cannot be kept fixed under one descriptive model. Following the model proposed by S. Pit Corder (1973), H. Douglas
Brown talks about four stages of learner development in the learning of a second language. These stages are based on the errors that learners manifest in their production of the target L2. The stages of Interlanguage are:

- **Stage of Random Errors:** This is the first stage in which a learner is vaguely aware about any systematic order to a particular class of items. S. Pit Corder calls this stage as “presystematic”. The learner is vaguely aware that there is some systematic order to a particular class of items. In this random error stage, the learner makes wild guesses at what to write. The learner shows several inconsistencies at the production level within a short span of time to express the same sentence. These inconsistent expressions indicate a stage of experimentation and inaccurate guessing.

- **Emergent Stage:** the emergent stage of interlanguage is the second stage where the learner’s linguistic production is found to be growing in consistency. In this stage the learner starts discerning a system and begins to internalize certain rules. By the standards of the target language, these rules that the learner has internalized may not be correct; but they are legitimate in the mind of the learner (Brown, 1987:175). “Backsliding” is another characteristic feature shown by the learner in the emergent stage. Here the learner seems to have grasped a rule or principle and then regresses to some previous stage. At this stage the learner is unable to correct errors when they are pointed out by someone else. Another typical feature of this stage is the avoidance of structures and topics.

- **Systematic stage:** This is the third stage of interlanguage where the learner is able to manifest more consistency in the production of the second language. When a learner reaches this stage, it is presumed that certain rules have been internalized by him or her. Though these rules are not all well-formed or show absolutely clarity in the mind of the learner, yet they are more “internally self-consistent and, of course, they are more closely approximating the target language system” (Brown, 1987: 176). The major difference between the second and the third stage is seen in the ability of the learners to correct their errors when they are pointed out to them. A subtle hint at their errors is enough to do the correction at this stage.

(50)
- **Stabilization stage:** The final stage is the stage of stabilization and Corder (1973) calls it the "postsystematic" stage. At this stage the learner has relatively few errors and has mastered the linguistic system of the target language to the point of fluency. The learner is able to articulate the intended meanings. The typical characteristic of this fourth stage is the learner’s ability to self correct. The linguistic system internalized by the learner is complete enough to pay attention to the few errors that occur and corrections could be made without waiting for feedback from someone else. This is the stage when learners can stabilize too fast and in the process minor errors slip by undetected. These unattended errors manifest fossilization of their language.

The above mentioned stages are stages of "systematicity" of a learner’s acquisition of a second language. These stages do not describe a learner’s total second language system. Moreover, it is difficult to assert that a particular learner is in a particular stage of IL for all the linguistic subsystems of the target L2. The learner might be in a second stage with respect to the perfect-tense system, but the same learner can be in the third stage or fourth stage when it comes to simple present or simple past tense.

Brown (1987: 177) opines that these stages are based on error analysis and they do not adequately account for sociolinguistic, functional, or nonverbal strategies, which are necessary in assessing the total competence of the L2 learner. He makes it clear that production errors alone are not adequate to check the overall competence of the learners. But, nevertheless, these stages do point out the salient features of the second language learners’ interlanguage. In the teaching-learning process, the knowledge of these stages help the teachers to highlight the correct utterances of the learners, and, correct utterances definitely deserve positive reinforcement.

In this study, to find out the cross-linguistic influences from Assamese into English, the linguistic category of verbs has been selected. This is because, in the English language a grammatical sentence must have two minimum constituents—the subject and the verb (subject + verb). Hence, verbs are a compulsory constituent in any English sentence. Apart from this, there is another reason why verbs as a category have been selected. Being an integral part of a sentence, the verb or the verb phrase
occupies a very important position in the grammar of any language. The verb or the verb phrase carries information about tense, mood, modality, aspect and voice.

Class observation and empirical experiences show that most L2 learners of English are confused with the tense system. To check this observation the learner respondents of this study were given a worksheet where they had to identify the verbs, change the form as directed, change the form of the verb into the past tense. There was a question on a free composition also. The errors were marked out from these worksheets for the error analysis to be applied. It is expected that the application of error analysis would help in finding out the most common area of difficulty and also the stage of interlanguage in which most of these learner respondents can be clubbed.

2.4 Sociolinguistic Factors:

The Sociolinguistic Factors responsible for second language acquisition and the social contexts relevant for the study of second language acquisition would be dealt with in the following pages.

When we consider what is required for appropriate language use, we also need to consider the social and cultural knowledge embedded in the language being learned. Along with it we need to consider what L2 learners must know in order to communicate effectively. It brings us to the domain of communicative competence. We are going to deal with it in another space.

The entire aspect of language learning has a social perspective. From this sociolinguistic perspective, the idea of linguistic competence becomes inadequate for what is being acquired in any language that is going to be used for communicative purposes. Dell Hymes in 1966, while establishing a framework called the Ethnography of Communication, made a critical observation that “speakers who can produce any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language, would be institutionalized if they indiscriminately went about trying to do so” (Saville-Troike, 2010: 100). In the then emerging field of sociolinguistics, the concept of communicative competence became a basic tenet and was adopted by the researchers and specialists in the field of second language acquisition and language teaching. In simple terms this term means “what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular language community” (Saville-Troike, 2003). It involves knowing not only the critical components like vocabulary, phonology,
grammar and other aspects of linguistic structure, but also aspects like “when to speak (or not), what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation” (Saville-Troike, 2010:100). Further, the concept of communicative competence involves the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have so that they are enabled to use and interpret linguistic forms.

To understand the social contexts of language learning in a multilingual setting, the clarification of certain terms become necessary.

The term language community refers to a group of people “who share knowledge of a common language to at least some extent” (Saville-Troike, 2010). Individuals, who could generally be considered as multilinguals, are often members of more than one language community. Of course, their multilingual capacities vary to different degrees. The language or languages they orient themselves to at any given moment gets reflected in not only which segment of their linguistic knowledge they select, but also which interaction skills they use and which features of their cultural knowledge they activate. Regarding the linguistic competence of the non-native speakers of a language, it might differ significantly from the competence of the native speakers, even though they may be participating in the same or overlapping language communities. This entire process may include structural differences in the linguistic system, different rules for usage in writing or conversation, and even divergent meanings for the same lexical forms. Assessing a multilingual speaker’s total communicative competence, we find that it differs from the total communicative competence of a monolingual when we include the knowledge of rules for the appropriate choice of language and for switching between languages, given a particular social context and communicative purpose.

Researchers of sociolinguistics consider several frameworks for the study of second language acquisition and learning. Some of the frameworks that are considered within the social perspective can also be considered as a linguistic concern because they relate to language form and function. Some of the frameworks can also be considered as a cognitive concern since they explore the learning processes or attitudes and motivation. All these factors emphasize the importance of social context for language acquisition and use.
For the study of second language acquisition, from the sociolinguistic perspective, there are two foci: microsocial and macrosocial. These two levels of social contexts also affect language learning. The microsocial focus deals with the potential effects of different immediately surrounding circumstances. The macrosocial focus relates SLA to broader cultural, political and educational environments.

The main concerns of the microsocial focus relate to language acquisition and its use in immediate social contexts of production, interpretation, and interaction. The frameworks provided by Variation Theory and Accomodation Theory are relevant here because they include exploration of systematic differences in learner production which depend on contexts of use. They also consider why the targets of second language acquisition may be different even within groups who are ostensibly learning the same language. The Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky also contributes to the microsocial focus as it views interaction as the essential genesis of language.

2.4.1 The microsocial factors of second language learning:
- Variation
- Input and interaction
- Interaction as the genesis of language or Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory

Variation

Since the 1970s the second language acquisition researchers have been primarily concerned with the sociolinguistic factors. These scholars gave extensive attention to the factor of variation.

L2 learner language is highly variable. This variability is due to the changes that occur in what learners know and can produce as they progressively achieve higher levels of proficiency in the L2. Considerable variation is also seen in learners’ L2 production at every stage of their interlanguage. These differences we can attribute to the learners’ social context also.

Among the major contributors of sociolinguistics, Labov’s name comes among the pioneers in propagating the variation theory. Earlier linguists considered the irregularity in language production as unsystematic. But the sociolinguists supporting
the Variation theory have been able to demonstrate that the irregularity in language production, when treated as variable features, can be seen to follow regular and predictable patterns. These variable features are multiple linguistic forms which are "systematically or predictably used by different speakers of a language, or by the same speakers at different times, with the same (or very similar) meaning or function" (Saville-Troike, 2010:102). These variable features occur at every linguistic level:

- **Vocabulary:** Example of variable vocabulary—"I ate dinner" or "I ate supper" are both correct expressions that are spoken by native English speakers.38
- **Phonology:** Example of variable phonology—"She was coming" or "She was comin'".
- **Morphology:** Example of variable morphology—"She has sewed" or "She has sewn".
- **Syntax:** Example of variable syntax—"That is a big book" or "That a big book".
- **Discourse:** Example of variable discourse—Responding to an introduction with "Hi" or "I am very pleased to meet you".

These variable features include both standard or "correct" options and nonstandard options also. From the examples given above it becomes clear that these variable features are a characteristic of all natural language production, both L1 and L2.

The occurrence of the variable features in the production of any one speaker (both L1 and L2) depends largely on the communicative contexts in which it has been learned and used. Some relevant communicative contexts are.39

- **Linguistic Contexts:** Linguistic contexts include those elements of language form and function which are associated with the variable element. Considering the examples given above, the phonological variable [N] in *coming* is more likely to be used before a word which begins with a back consonant or before a pause and the variable [n] in *comin'* is more likely to be used before a front consonant. The part of speech can also be an important linguistic context, with production of [N] frequently seen in one-syllable nouns like *ring*, *song*, etc and the occurrence of [n] in the progressive form of verbs, as in *I'm workin'*. 

- **Psychological context:** The psychological contexts include those factors associated with the amount of attention being given to language form during
production, the level of “automaticity versus control in processing” (Saville-Troike, 2010:103), or the intellectual demands of a particular task. For example, in the sentence “That is a big book”, the copula ‘is’ may be produced during a formal second language lesson or in a writing exercise. But it could be omitted in informal conversation even at the same point of L2 development.

- **Microsocial contexts**: Microsocial contexts include those features of setting or situation and interaction which “relate to communicative events within which language is being produced, interpreted, and negotiated” (Saville-Troike, 2010). These features include the level of formality and participants’ relationship to one another, and whether the interaction is public or intimate.

- **Macrosocial factors**: Among the relevant contextual dimensions of variation, the macrosocial factors could also be included. Macrosocial factors do influence linguistic variation. These factors include those features of the larger political setting within which language learning and use takes place. They also include the social position and role of users. The features also encompass societal attitudes toward specific languages and multilingualism in general, institutional organizations. To cite an example of the macrosocial factors leading to variation: “standard and prestige L2 forms are more likely to be used by international students or diplomats while they are functioning within those social roles than by the same individuals while they are shopping in a market or visiting tourist sites” (Saville-Troike, 2010: 103)

**The Accommodation Theory**

This theory also throws substantial light on the communicative contexts of variation. On the basis of this Accommodation Theory framework, researchers opine that speakers change their pronunciation and even the grammatical complexity of their sentences to sound similar to whom they are talking to. This they do often unconsciously. This framework also reasons out to some extent the native speakers’ tendency to simplify their language when they are talking to an L2 learner who is not fluent. Also, this theory answers the question why L2 learners often acquire different varieties of the target language when they have different friends belonging to different linguistic and social background.
The second microsocial factor that affects second language learning is input and interaction. For L2 learning to take place (even L1), language input to the learner is absolutely necessary. Many approaches talk about the necessity of input in language learning, but their interpretation of the nature of its role is in dispute.

**Considering the linguistic approaches towards input,**

- followers of the behaviourist learning theories consider input as the “necessary stimuli and feedback which learners respond to and imitate” (Saville-Troike, 2010: 105).
- Researchers who follow Krashen’s Monitor Model consider **comprehensible input** as a necessity which is sufficient in itself and it accounts for second language acquisition.
- The proponents of the Universal Grammar theory consider **exposure to input** as the important and necessary trigger to activate learning mechanisms. These scholars also opine that for many aspects of language development beyond the initial period, exposure to input becomes less important.

**The psychological approaches considering input a necessary factor,**

- The followers of the Information Processing framework consider input as essential data for the different stages of language processing. They call this input which is attended to as **intake**.
- The followers of the connectionist framework go a step further and consider the quantity or frequency of input structures as the necessary ingredients that determine acquisitional sequencing. (Actual frequencies sometimes partially contradict this.

**Some of the social approaches also consider input as—**

- Input is primarily “data” which is essential for innate linguistic and cognitive processes.
- Some other schools claim that input has a more important role in determining what features of language are learned, and how they are learned.

Along with input **social interaction** is equally essential for language acquisition.
and learning. For L1 acquisition interaction becomes a necessity as children cannot learn their initial language by listening to radio broadcasts, tape recordings, or television programmes. The social approaches to language learning also consider interaction as an important ingredient.42

- They consider the nature and role of interaction in L2 acquisition.
- They try to find ways in which interaction becomes helpful and necessary for the development of advanced levels of L2 proficiency.
- Some social approaches also give the perspective that interaction is generally essential in providing learners with the quantity and quality of external linguistic input. This input is required for internal processing and helping focus learner attention on aspects of their L2 which differ from target language norms or goals.
- From the social perspective, interaction is also helpful in providing collaborative means for learners to build discourse structures and express meanings which are beyond the current level of the learners' linguistic competence.

There are several types of interaction and interactional modification among the non-native speakers and the native speakers which can enhance second language acquisition. The interactional modification techniques include repetition, paraphrase, expansion and elaboration, sentence completion, frame for substitution, vertical construction, comprehension check and request for clarification.

Feedback is another type of interaction which can enhance SLA. This feedback is generally from native speakers of the target language or someone proficient in the target language. Feedbacks are in the form of direct or indirect corrections and they can be considered as direct or indirect feedbacks.

Language input contributes to acquisition only if the input is allowed access into the mind for processing. This input then becomes intake. The Interaction Hypothesis claims that the modifications and collaborative efforts that take place in social interaction facilitate SLA because they contribute to the accessibility of input for mental processing (Saville-Troike, 2010). M.H.Long43 opines that “negotiation for meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the native speakers or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because
it connects input, internal learner capacities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways” (Long, 1996: 151-52).

From the point of view of interaction, what is acquired in L2 includes only that portion of L2 input “which is assimilated and fed into the IL system” (Ellis, 1985: 159). L2 is acquired in a “dynamic interplay of external input and internal processes, with interaction facilitating (not causing) SLA” (Saville-Troike, 2010: 11).

It is often seen that some learners are more successful than others. From the social perspective, the primary reason includes their degree of access to social experiences which allow for negotiation of meaning and corrective feedback.

Interaction- the Genesis of Language learning:

Further enhancing the role of interaction in second language acquisition is the Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky. The major concept offered by this approach is that “interaction not only facilitates language learning but is a causative force in acquisition...” (Saville-Troike, 2010:111). This theory further sees all learning as essentially a social process which is grounded in sociocultural settings. The Sociocultural Theory claims that learning occurs when simple innate mental activities are transformed into “higher order”, or more complex mental functions. This transformation involves symbolic mediation. Symbolic mediation is a link between a person’s current mental state and higher order functions that is provided primarily by language. The Sociocultural Theory considers this as the usual route to learning; no matter what is being learned is language or some area of knowledge. Learning through mediation shows its own results. The results include-

- Learners are seen to have heightened awareness of their own mental abilities.
- They have more control over their thought processes.

To further specify Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, the concept of symbolic mediation can be divided into interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction.

Interpersonal Interaction

Interpersonal Interaction includes the communicative events and situations which occur between people. Interpersonal interaction between learners and experts is an important context for symbolic mediation. According to Vygotsky, the level where
much of interpersonal interaction type of mediation occurs can be called as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is an “area of potential development, where the learner can achieve that potential only with assistance” (Saville-Troike, 2010:112). Through this concept Vygotsky pioneered the notion that children learn within communities, rather than strictly as individuals. They learn more with the support of adults around them. According to the Sociocultural Theory, mental functions that are beyond an individual’s current level must be performed in collaboration with other people before they are achieved independently.

Intrapersonal Interaction

The Sociocultural Theory, along with the concept of interpersonal interaction, considers another kind of interaction—the intrapersonal interaction. When communication occurs within an individual’s own mind it is known as intrapersonal interaction. According to Vygotsky intrapersonal interaction should be viewed as sociocultural phenomenon.

- There are several types of Intrapersonal activities. Reading is an intrapersonal as well as interpersonal activity. While reading “we draw interactively on our ability to decode print, our stored knowledge of the language we are reading and the content schemata through which our knowledge of the world is organized” (Ellis, 1999:1)

- A second type of intrapersonal interaction is translation. This kind of intrapersonal interaction occurs frequently in the beginning stages of L2 learning and also in the later stages of L2 learning, where the learners make use of L1 resources. The kind of translation used here is translation to oneself as part of interpretive problem-solving processes.

- Another type of intrapersonal interaction is private speech. Private speech can also be called as self-talk. It is very common to see children get engaged in self-talk and we also get to see adults doing the same in many occasions. Self-talk leads to inner speech that mature individuals use to control thought and behaviour. Private speech is generally lower in volume than interactional speech; most of the time it is inaudible.
A common intrapersonal activity that is closely related to private speech is private writing. Individuals record language forms and other meaningful symbols on paper in order to help store items in memory, organize thought, solve problems, or such, without intent to communicate with others. Common examples of private writing are:

- Students' personal journals or diaries to keep their learning experiences.
- Jotting notes in the margins of textbooks.
- List new words along with some mnemonic aid.
- Write interlinear L1 translations in a text.
- Highlight or underline important points in a text.
- Many language teachers list major topics and activities.

Socio-cultural theory claims that language is learned through socially mediated activities. It supports the view that some learners are more successful than others and this is attributed to:

- their level of access to or participation in a learning community,
- to their amount of mediation they receive from their experts or peers, and also
- How well they make use of the help they receive in the various interpersonal or intrapersonal interactions.

### 2.4.2 Macrosocial Factors

Macrosocial focus concentrates on how to relate language acquisition and use to the broader ecological contexts, including cultural, political and educational settings. In this regard the theoretical framework of the **Ethnography of Communication** becomes relevant. This framework extends the notion of what is being acquired in second language acquisition beyond linguistic and cultural factors. This framework gives importance to the social and cultural knowledge that is required for appropriate use. Along with it, the Ethnography of Communication theory considers second language learners as members of groups or communities with socio-political as well as linguistic bounds.

Apart from the framework of Ethnography of Communication, there are two other frameworks to support the macrosocial focus of the study of second language
learning. They are the Acculturation Theory and the Social Psychology framework. These theories offer broader understandings of how such factors like identity, status, and values affect the second language acquisition.

The major macrosocial factors that need to be considered in the context of second language acquisition are:

- Global and national status of L1 and L2
- Boundaries and identities
- Institutional forces and constraints
- Social categories
- Circumstances of learning

Global and National Status of L1 and L2

Languages enjoy different levels of power and status at different levels like global and national. The reasons for this power and status are symbolic and practical.

The most striking symbolic function of language is political identification and cohesion. The example of the USA will be befitting here. In the USA, English is accepted as the single national language and most people consider it important for national unity. For the immigrants who come from other linguistic backgrounds, they are expected to learn English as a requirement for citizenship, for participation in US democratic processes, for economic mobility and for access to education and other social services. It is often seen that the maintenance of indigenous and immigrant languages are discouraged.

In this kind of a situation, pride in ethnicity along with the associated language use is generally viewed as a threat to the dominant group, and is symbolically associated with disunity and separatism.

Political identification and cohesion as the symbolic function of language gains even more relevance for countries that are in the process of nation-building. The example of Israel would be proper here. Establishing the official use of Hebrew was symbolically very important to the creation of Israel, even though there were only a small number of citizens who spoke Hebrew natively.

From the historical perspective, in times of conquest and empire-building, sec-
ond languages have also served political functions. Examples:

- The Norman conquest brought French L2 to Great Britain,
- Colonial expansion brought English L2 to Africa and Asia and French L2 to Africa,
- Post-World War 2 domination by the soviet union brought Russian L2 to most of the regions of Eastern Europe.

From both the historical and present contexts, the need for L2 learning at a national level becomes necessary when

- Groups from other language backgrounds immigrate to a country without prior knowledge of its official or dominant language and
- When the official or dominant language shifts because of conquest, revolution or other political changes.

Often it is seen that the need for L2 learning at a global level is motivated by control of and access to resources in areas of commerce and information/technology transfer. Opportunities and motivation for learning an L2 often depend on its relative power or status, both symbolic and practical. One cannot separate this from the relative economic or military power or status of the society that it represents.

The recent increase in the number of Chinese L2 learners in India can be attributed to this cause.

**Boundaries and Identities**

Language is a major factor in identity mobilization and formation and part of this identity function of language gets accomplished by the creation or reinforcement of national boundaries. The existence of linguistic boundaries come within the national boarders or can cross beyond the national borders. These linguistic boundaries serve as a unifying force among speakers as members of one language community. These boundaries also serve as forces that exclude outsiders from insider communication.

Since this particular factor goes beyond the direct purview of this study, an elaborate discussion becomes meaningless here.

**Institutional forces and constraints**

In a nation or within a community, social institutions represent a systematic
order established by law, custom, or practice in order to regulate and organize the life of people in public domains like politics, religion, and education. Many of these social institutions involve power, authority, and influence related to second language acquisition. These forces and constraints are concerned with the language related social control, determination of access to knowledge, and other linguistic privilege or discrimination. A very clear example of linguistic social control is official or unofficial policies that regulate which language is to be used in particular situations. For example, the use of the national language is often required in various official, political, bureaucratic or other functions and situations.

In India, to keep the multilingual nature of India intact, the central government has officially recommended the “Three Language Formula” (as recommended by the Kothari Commission, 1964). It is a policy meant to foster feelings of national pride (through Hindi), a sense of group identity (through the regional language), and induce technological progress (through English). As recommended by this policy, English is now a compulsory subject to be learnt by all learners from the elementary level up to the undergraduate level. The implementation of this policy in all the states of India has raised the level of motivation among all learners, teachers and guardians to learn English or to make their wards learn the same. Moreover, the better career placements of the learners who are proficient in English have always been motivation enough to learn the language.

In India, English has become the officially designated language of service. Every official document uses English along with the official regional languages. These factors act as compulsions for the learners to learn English and attain the desired level of proficiency.

Social Categories

When people in a society need to be categorized, it has to be done in accordance with certain socially relevant dimensions like age, sex, ethnicity, education level, occupation and economic status. From the sociolinguistic point of view, these categories are important because they influence what experiences the learners have, how they are perceived by others, and what is expected of them. In the process of
learning a second language, “members of different social categories frequently experience different learning conditions, and different attitudes or perceptions from within both native and target language communities” (Saville-Troike, 2010:125). Hence, these categories become very relevant in the macrosocial context of second language acquisition. The social categories are:

- Age: Commonly, age is accepted as a biological factor. But it is a social factor as well. It is seen that young L2 learners, in comparison to older learners, are more likely to acquire the target language in a naturalistic setting as opposed to a formal classroom context. In “highly contextualized face-to-face situations” the young L2 learners are more likely to use the L2 than in a “decontextualized academic” situation. But this not a rule. Exceptions are there. Among immigrant learners of L2, the older group always seem to be in an advantageous position.

- Sex: Like age, sex is also a biological as well as a social category. Different attitudes and learning conditions which are experienced by males and females may advantage one group over the other for second language acquisition in different ways and in different societies. This advantage is not innate. From the second language acquisition point of view, boys seem to be in a more advantageous position. Young male children get more chance to go out of the house and participate with children from other families. More playmates mean more interaction and more speech situations. Girls are more or less confined to the house as they are trained to look after the house and because of their responsibility to care for younger siblings and for their own safety. But girls seem to overcome their initial limitations on their opportunity for social interaction and language learning with subsequent experience. Different learning conditions for males and females are seen among older age groups also. Female students enrolled in study-abroad programs report of having less opportunity than male students to immerse themselves in foreign language and cultural experiences. They also report of avoiding situations where they fear to encounter sexual harassment.45

- Ethnic Category: As a factor, ethnic category influences second language acquisition primarily because of “socially constructed attitudes from within
native and target communities as a result of historic or current intergroup relations related to social boundaries and identities" (Saville-Troike, 2010:126).

- Religion and Cultural background are other macrosocial factors that influence second language acquisition indirectly. These factors, along with ethnic category, potentially contribute to perceptions of social distance.

In a multilingual society, it is a common perception that the members of certain language communities are more privileged than others and this leads to a corollary perception of the existence of dominant languages. And, dominant languages do exist in society. Perceptions of being privileged or less privileged are determined by factors like which group is politically and economically dominant in a multietnic society. This dominant or privileged group generally happens to be the one that has the majority status.

Two outcomes of second language acquisition related to the dimension of the presence of dominant and privileged ethnic groups are the two types of bilingualism²

- Additive Bilingualism- It is the result of second language acquisition in social contexts where members of a dominant group learn the language of a minority or subordinate group without threat to their L1 competence or to their ethnic identity.

- Subtractive Bilingualism- It is the result of second language acquisition in social contexts where members of a subordinate or minority group learn the dominant language as L2. These learners are always under the threat that they are likely to experience some loss of ethnic identity and attrition of L1 skills. This threat is more lurking when the L2 learners are children.

- Learning Circumstances: This is a macrosocial factor in the ecological context of second language acquisition. Learning begins with children’s first experiences with the families into which they are born, the communities to which they belong, and the cultural environment within which they live. By the time children begin their formal education, they already internalize many of the basic values and beliefs of their native culture, and they also have learned the rules of behaviour which are considered appropriate for their role in the community, and also have established the procedures for continued socialization.

(66)
“They have learned how to learn” (Saville-Troike, 2010). And all this happens at the tender age of six or seven years. As a macrosocial factor, learning circumstances do influence second language acquisition.

After the above discussion on the various theoretical perspectives this chapter would remain incomplete if one aspect is not discussed. This aspect is related to the primary aim of learning the English language as a second language in a non-native social context in the “Assamese medium” schools in Assam. It is communicative competence.

2.4.3 Communicative Competence

Learning a second language for communicative purposes requires knowledge and skills for using it appropriately, as well as knowing the aspects of linguistic forms and how they are organized. The first language competence involves the broad repertoire of knowledge which people need to communicate appropriately for many purposes within their native language community. But the amount of knowledge required for second language competence is more restricted , especially when second language acquisition takes place in a foreign language setting. For most learners, their second language often serves a much more limited range of needs than their first language, depending on the situation they are in. Different kinds of learners need different types of motivation to learn the second language. Each kind of motivation entails very different combinations of linguistic and cultural knowledge and different levels and types of proficiency.

For the purpose of this study, we need to distinguish between two forms of knowledge required for communicative competence. They are:

- Knowledge that must be learned in order to fulfill academic functions.
- Knowledge that is required for interpersonal functions.

Academic competence includes the knowledge needed by learners who want to use the second language primarily to learn about other subjects. This second language becomes a tool for further research. It is also used as a medium in a specific professional or occupational field. The second language learners, whose primary goal is to attain academic competence, need to concentrate on acquiring the specific
vocabulary and try to develop the knowledge that enables them to read the relevant texts in the subject area. Vocabulary knowledge and reading abilities apart, these L2 learners also need to concentrate on developing the ability to engage successfully in academic listening and attain proficiency in academic writing. Proficiency in academic writing becomes important because they need to display their knowledge while taking examinations for the purpose of university admission or to earn academic degrees. L2 academic writing proficiency is essential for writing term papers, theses and publishing articles also.

Interpersonal competence includes that kind of knowledge required by learners who intend to use the second language primarily in direct contact situations with other speakers. It is used as the medium for interpersonal communication.

This study “A Critical Study of the Cross-linguistic Influences on Learning English in the Regional Medium Schools in Assam”, tries to study the academic competence of the learners and in doing so, the academic writing skill of the learners would be specifically taken into account. The reason is that in the typical setting of these regional medium schools the learners are being trained to use English mainly for the purpose of writing. For these learners interpersonal communication in English is never a priority. According to Saville-Troike, to develop L2 academic proficiency in reading, listening and writing does not necessarily require “fluent speaking ability, particularly for learners studying the L2 in a foreign language context” (Saville-Troike, 2010).

English is an official language in India and because of its utility aspect it gets the position of a second language. When the context of learning English by the learner respondents of this study is considered, it is seen that English is learnt in a foreign language context. A foreign language is a language not widely used in the learners’ immediate social context and there is hardly any immediate or necessary practical application. To say that the learners from the regional medium schools in Assam are alien to the use of English words around them would be wrong. Many English words are commonly used as a part of the Assamese vocabulary. It is a result of borrowing transfer from English. Many native Assamese speakers use ‘pen’, ‘glass’, ‘television’, ‘radio’, ‘bulb’, ‘telephone’, ‘tap’, ‘school’, ‘van’, and a huge number of English nouns.
in their native speech instead of using the equivalent nouns available in their native language. Similar is the case with certain verbs like ‘use’, ‘handle’, ‘drive’, etc. But the context in which English is learnt by these learners is definitely foreign. In their immediate social context English is a foreign language with no immediate or necessary practical application.

This justifies the stand of this study- to concentrate only on the academic writing competence of the learners.


3 The term 'primary acquisition' was used by Lamendella (1977) instead of 'first language acquisition'. He opposed it with 'non-primary acquisition' which included the acquisition of a second, third or a fourth language.

4 Language Community: this term refers to a group of people who share knowledge of a common language.

5 Gardner worked with Lambert in several of his (Lambert's) projects on social psychology

6 Language Transfer, by Terence Odlin, pg27, Cambridge University Press, 2003


8 Sociolinguistics, by R.A.Hudson, pg 55, Cambridge University Press, 2001


14 Ibid, pg 12

15 Language Transfer, by Terence Odlin, pg36, Cambridge University Press, 2003


22 Ibid, pg 188
Production data refers to the speech and writing of learners.

Corder, S. Pit, Error Analysis and Interlanguage, Oxford University Press, 1987

Ibid

Saville-Troike, Muriel, Introducing Second Language Acquisition, Cambridge University Press, 2010

Ibid

Saville-Troike, Muriel, Introducing Second Language Acquisition, Cambridge University Press, 2010


Corder (1967) distinguishes between systematic errors and mistakes. Systematic errors, according to Corder, result from learners' lack of L2 knowledge and mistakes results from some kind of processing failure such as lapse in memory.

Interlingual implies between languages.

Intralingual implies within the language.

Intralingual errors are also considered developmental errors and they often represent incomplete learning of L2 rules or overgeneralization of them. In this study, the main focus will be on the interlingual factors.


Examples of reduced forms in an IL: Omission of inflections—e.g. omission of the past tense suffix in English.


Chomsky in 1965 gave a definition of linguistic “competence”. According to this definition a “competent” speaker can produce any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language. The newer sociolinguistic theories proved that Chomsky’s theory is just a part of the entire corpus.

All the examples of variable features are examples spoken by native speakers of English.


Example of social position and role of users—whether the language users are immigrants, international students, or visiting dignitaries.

For example—patterns of education, employment, and political participation.


The term “experts” here include teachers and more knowledgeable learners.

These reports are from Muriel Saville-Troike’s research works on migrant farm labourers and their language acquisition skills. But the findings of these reports tally to a good extent with the situation in India.

Lambert 1974; Gamer 2002; Saville-Troike 2010)


In a typical sense, a second language is an official or dominant language needed for the purpose of education, employment, trade and other basic purposes.