Chapter 4
Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction:

This study after travelling from the conceptual level in the first and the second chapters went on to dwell in the empirical domain in the third chapter. The third chapter deals with the study itself. A detailed discussion on the methodology, data collection process, survey tools used and everything related to the study and its methodological approaches have been included in the third chapter. The third chapter contains the data generated from the empirical study. For the empirical dimension of the study, a survey had been conducted in two phases. In the first phase a pilot survey was conducted in several schools in the Kamrup district. Schools of both urban and rural background were selected at random. All the schools are regional medium (Assamese) government run and provincial schools.

The second phase of field study was conducted in 9 districts of the Brahmaputra valley; the 4 regions of Upper Assam, Central Assam, Lower Assam and the North bank are covered. We have selected the schools on a random basis and two schools from the urban and two schools from the rural background are included from all the districts.

The Upper, Central, Lower regions and the North Bank of the Brahmaputra valley are the areas where most of the government run and provincial schools have Assamese as the medium of instruction. As the study plans to look into the cross-linguistic influences from Assamese into the learning of English, the districts selected will justify the purpose. Another rationale behind the selection of the districts is that, these districts fairly represent the Brahmaputra valley.

For collection of data from the field, a three stage simple questionnaire was designed. The first stage of the questionnaire was related to the demographic data pertaining to the informants. The second stage was for collection of data about the
awareness about the learning process of the Second language and in the third stage it was attempted to assess the knowledge of English grammar and comprehension. Over and above this questionnaire, another set of questionnaire was also designed to collect data from the teachers who have been teaching English in higher classes of the schools.

The data that had been collected with the help of the questionnaires have been converted into tables and all these tables are presented in the third chapter.

The current chapter in this study, this fourth chapter, aims at analyzing the data that had been laid in the third chapter. In this chapter an attempt has been made to analyze the data that had been collected empirically from the field. Along with the interpretation causal analysis of the data has also been attempted.

For the interpretation of the data two contrasting approaches have been drawn in: the **Ideographic and the Nomothetic approaches**. Ideographic approaches argue that the ultimate goal of science is to explain individual events. According to the ideographic approach, general laws and theories are useful in research as long as they help us understand a particular event. By contrast, nomothetic approaches argue that the ultimate goal is to uncover general truths that cover classes of occurrence. In the nomothetic approaches individual instances are of interest primarily as guides in developing a broader understanding. As a discipline develops, its explanations will tend to develop from an ideographic towards a nomothetic pattern and its theoretical base gets established. In this study, the respondents of the survey (the learner respondents of classes 9 and 10 studying in the regional medium schools in Assam) are the subjects who are unique individuals from the ideographic perspective. But these individuals have certain general properties or they behave according to general rules according to the nomothetic perspective.

The terms ideographic and nomothetic were introduced to American psychology by Gordon Allport (1937), who borrowed from the German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband. In psychology, ideographic describes the study of the individual who is seen as a unique individual, with a unique life history, with properties setting him or her apart from other individuals. Nomothetic describes the study of classes or cohorts of individuals. The subject is seen as an exemplar of a population and their corresponding personality traits and behaviours. In social sciences or sociology, the
nomothetic model tries to find independent variables that account for the variations in a given phenomenon. Nomothetic explanations are probabilistic and usually incomplete. The ideographic model focuses on a complete, in-depth understanding of individual cases for qualitative interpretations.

4.1.1 Data Interpretation

For proper analytical framework, the questions pertaining to the student respondents have been further divided into 5 conceptual categories:

I. **Background data of the learner respondents**: This category includes all the student’s individual details. The rural-urban and the male-female divisions are also included here. The data regarding the linguistic composition of the study group could also be included here. Questions 1 to 10 of the questionnaire deals with these data details.

II. **English Language Learning Situation**: In this category five questions are included (11, 16, 19, 20, 21). Through these questions details of the English language learning situation related to the individual learners have been collected. These include information on aspects like beginning standard of English language learning, areas of difficulty in learning English, and difficulties faced by the learners of English.

III. **Linguistic Environment**: This category includes information on the linguistic environment that surrounds the English language learner. Questions 4, 14, 15, 16, and 17 deal with this category. The aim of these questions is to know about the linguistic background and the situation in which they learn and use the target language English.

IV. **Cognitive Strategies**: This category includes questions 12, 13, and 18. The aim of this category is to find out whether the learners use any strategy to learn the target language English. Another relevant information that is being collected from this category is—whether the knowledge of the first language Assamese acts as a support base to learn the target language English.

V. **Learners’ attitude towards the target language**: This category includes questions 16, 22, 23, 24. In this category the questions deal with the attitude of the learners towards the target language English and also the reason for the relevance of learning this language. This will help in learning the source of motivation of the English
language learners in Assam.

4.2 The Questionnaire for the learners

Categories

4.2.1 (I) Background data of the learner respondents:

The first ten Questions of the questionnaire are meant to collect the background data of the learner respondents. The name of the school, its address, the district, where is it situated (rural or urban), name, sex, caste, standard of learning, parents’ names, parents’ occupation and home language of the learner respondents are all included in these questions. From the responded questionnaires certain tables and diagrams have been prepared. Among the questions of the background data question 5 is analysed first.

Relevance of learners’ background in the English language learning scene

Language learning is a cognitive process as well as a social process. Hence, there are many motivating factors that help in the acquisition of a language. In the case of learning a second language, the cognitive process is also stimulated by the language environment and the atmosphere at home and at school. For a second language researcher knowing the background of the learners becomes essential. From the background knowledge of the learners and the environment in which they learn English, the researcher tries to find out the level of motivation prevailing among the learner respondents. Keeping this in mind, the questionnaire under analysis begins with the background data of the learners.

The first few questions deal with name and address of the school, district where the school is located, the rural—urban allocation of the school. The name, sex, caste of the respondents, parents’ name and occupation are also included here. The class in which the respondents are reading is also included here. A very relevant question in the category of learners’ background is about the home language of the learners.

The fifth question deals with the standard in which the learner respondents were reading during the survey.

Q.5) In which class do you read?

During the survey a total of 174 respondent (students) were examined out of which 73 (41.95%) were females and 101 (58.05%) were males. Among the
respondents, majority belonged to class X i.e. 56.90 percent; but differences can be observed between boys and girl respondents. Most of the girl respondents are from Class IX while most of the boys are from class X.

From the first few questions of the questionnaire, the rural-urban and male-female distribution of the study group was also divided. It may be seen that majority of the respondents are from rural background (55.18%). In this study group, the number of rural males (55.45%) is more than rural females (44.55%). A total of 44.25% of the respondents are from urban background.

The aim of this study is to find out the result of the cross-linguistic influences on the learning of English among the learners of the regional medium schools of Assam. The respondents of the study group were selected at random and there is no specific design to divide the learner respondents as male or female for any gender-specific analysis.

Question no. 4 is the next relevant question in this category.

Q.4) What is your home language? Or, in which language do you speak at home?

The response to this question shows that there are respondents from eight different language backgrounds. They are- Assamese, Goalporia, Bihari, Adibasi, Tea-tribe, Bengali, Mishing and Nepali. A small group of learners (1.73%) did not respond to this question. Among these linguistic groups respondents from the Assamese language are the highest and they constitute 68.96% of the whole lot. This makes Assamese the dominant language in this study group. The table (name) in chapter 3 shows the entire distribution of the linguistic composition of the sample.

Analysis

The presence of eight different home languages in this small study group of 174 respondents is a very prominent landmark presenting the multilingual and multicultural mosaic of Assam. In Assam, there are more than 80 social groups who either have their own languages or speak varieties of some other languages.

Though these languages are present in our study group, yet the respondent students are proficient enough in the Assamese language which is the ambient language. Being the ambient language, Assamese is accessible in the sociolinguistic environment and these respondents get ample scope to interact in the same. The learner respondents
being regular students in the regional (Assamese) medium schools are a proof that they possess native-like proficiency in both receptive and productive skills in the Assamese language. Hence, their presence in our canvas is logical.

The presence of eight different home languages in this study denotes other facts about the linguistic environment of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam which would be discussed in another heading later.

4.2.2 (II) English Language Learning Situation:

In this category five questions are included (11, 16, 19, 20, 21). Through these questions details of the English language learning situation related to the individual learners have been collected. These include information on aspects like beginning standard of English language learning, areas of difficulty in learning English, and difficulties faced by the learners of English.

Question 11 in this category comes first and it is about the beginning stage of learning English. It indicates the class from which the learner’s exposure into the target language English has started.

**Q.11) From which class (standard) have you started learning English?**

There were three options for this class 1, class-3, and class-5

The response is shown in Chapter 3, Table to Q. 11.

Almost all the students under survey had started their English language learning during their elementary school days. Majority of them had started their English learning in class III (63.79%) followed by 19.54 percent in class V. Only 15.52 percent started learning English in class I.

It may be observed from the table (Chapter 3, Q. 11) that the percentage of girls who started learning English in class III are more than the percentage of boys while percentage of boys beginning to learn English in class I is more than percentage of girls.

**Analysis**

In Assam as in several states in India, English is introduced in their curriculum in the elementary stage. At present, English is introduced in the regional medium schools in Assam at an even earlier stage or the pre-elementary stage known as “Ka Shreni”.

The introduction stage of a second language forms a crucial aspect for the proper learning of the language. The stage in which it is to be introduced must be seriously
considered by all the stakeholders in the education department.

When English is introduced in the regional medium schools in Assam, the learners are very young. It is a common belief that young children can acquire languages very fast. This is absolutely true of the first language. The discussion that follows about the innate capacity will clarify this aspect. But with the second language there are wide differences in the acquisition process.

Innate Capacity—Critical Period—LAD

All normal human beings are born with a natural ability to talk and this is known as the ‘innate capacity’ to learn languages. We assume that because of this innate capacity of human beings children can perform many feats in language learning. It is noticed that children learn their L1 at the same age whether it is in India, England, Africa, or in any part of the world, or any language in the world. The basic phonological and grammatical operations in their L1, regardless of what the language is, are mastered by children by the age of five or six. Children can create and understand new utterances. This innate knowledge is what Chomsky refers to as the ‘language faculty’, which is “a component of the human mind, physically represented in the brain and part of the biological endowment of the species” (Chomsky, 2002:1).

Saville-Troike (2010) opines that part of language structure is genetically inherited by every human child. Children’s ability to create new utterances is remarkable, and their ability to recognize ungrammatical sentences formed with common words is even surprising. To this regard, one particular hypothesis has gained popularity among linguists and psychologists. According to this hypothesis, all languages have certain abstract principles that are common to all languages and certain principles that are language-specific. According to this view, the universal principles are “programmed” into all human children by virtue of their being human. This particular hypothesis became popular with Chomsky’s linguistic framework of Universal Grammar (UG), which claims that L1 acquisition can be accounted for only by innate knowledge that the human species is genetically endowed with. This argument justifies children as better language learners.

Another hypothesis related to the learning age of language is the Critical Period Hypothesis. It claims that children have only a limited number of years during which
they can acquire L1 flawlessly. Beyond this age normal language development would not be possible. This concept is extended to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research also and claims that only children are likely to achieve native or near-native proficiency in L2.

Language Acquisition Device (LAD) is a metaphor used by Chomsky to refer to children’s language faculty, or the “component of the human mind” that accounts for children’s innate knowledge of language.

But, all first language acquisition cannot be attributed to innate ability. This is because language specific learning also plays a crucial role. It is accepted that the universal properties of language are pre-programmed in children, yet they must all learn the features which distinguish their L1 from all other possible human languages. Children can never acquire the language-specific knowledge unless that language is used with them and around them. Children learners will learn to use the language or languages that are being used around them, no matter to what linguistic heritage they belong.

The introduction of a second language forms a crucial aspect for the proper learning of the language. The stage in which it is to be introduced must be seriously considered by all the stake holders in the education department.

As already mentioned above, English is introduced in the regional medium schools in Assam at the pre-elementary level or pre-primary level. The causal explanations for the early learning of the first language cannot solve the problems that arise out of the early introduction of the second language. The introduction of English at a very early stage in a state like Assam do not hold good with the English language learning situation in this region.

Every learner has a home language and when this learner joins school for receiving formal teachings he or she encounters a conflict with the medium of instruction at school. For example, a child whose home language is the lower Assam dialect of Assamese joins school and finds that it is a different version of the same Assamese language that is being used as the medium of instruction. Slowly he/she learns that the written form varies from the variety that is being spoken at home. The learner gets ample time to get settled and comfortable if he/she is allowed to develop
the first language for the first few years of his/her formal education; in this case all the varieties of Assamese are referred to.

But the present language learning situation in the regional medium schools in Assam, at the pre-school level, does not allow this luxury to the learners. Along with the first conflict, another conflict is encountered by the learners when English is introduced at a very early level. The child learners hardly get time to settle down and get comfortable with their first language when English is introduced. It would be another debate if we try to assess the relevance of introducing English at such an early stage. But field experiences show that the result of such experimentations leads to the learners getting confused with their second language acquisition and learning. Consequently, they can hardly become proficient enough to produce correct sentences in English even after learning the language for ten to twelve years. Of course, exceptions are there and many learners are seen performing very well.

At this point, one fallout of the early introduction of English as the second language at a very early age is that the learners get thoroughly confused. This confusion can be attributed to the negative influences of the cross-linguistic influences. At this stage negative influences show stronger tendencies of manifestation. The error analysis applied and the contrastive analysis of the tense system done at a later space will help in the clarification of this issue.

It is true that the obvious results of the negative influences of the cross-linguistic influences are common, yet, exceptions are always there. A good number of learners always manage to score satisfactory marks in the H.S.L.C. This is because the negative influences are checked by the high motivation level at home, at school or among friends.

The next question in this category is question 16. It is about the use of English words in their regular speech.

**Q.16) Do you use English words when you talk in your mother tongue?**

In order to have an idea about using English words while speaking in mother tongue, the students under study are asked to reply a question to this extent. The result is presented in the table Q.16).

It may be observed from the table that as many as 89.08 percent students admitted
using English words while speaking in mother tongue.

This question not only talks about the English language learning situation but also about other issues like linguistic environment and attitude towards the language.

Even though English is a foreign language, yet this language is not alien to our culture. Many English words supplant the native words. This is so in all spheres of language use.

This aspect shall be discussed along with the category of linguistic environment later.

In this category question 19 comes next.

Q.19) What are the difficulties that you face while learning English?

Seven options are given to choose an answer from. The student respondents can opt for more than one option. The options are:

- Do not understand the language properly.
- Teacher explains in a complicated manner.
- Grammar is difficult to understand.
- Finds difficult to write in English or afraid to do the same.
- English texts are not available.
- This subject is of no use to us.
- Any other reason.

In the process of acquisition of the target language English, problems occur due to the operation of a number of factors. The students under survey were asked about the problem areas in process of English learning. They were given seven choices. Majority (63.22%) of the students gave single choices while 32.19 percent gave two choices. See chapter 3, Table A of Q.19.

Those who gave single choices majority (50.91%) preferred to say that their problem is, ‘they do not understand the language well’. Followed by the group who have ‘problem of writing in English or fear to write in English’ (20-.91%). Another prominent group is the one who find it ‘tough to understand English grammar’. Chapter 3, Table B Q.19 gives the details.

A considerable number of students have shown dual problems on their way of learning English. The highest frequency occurs in the areas- ‘do not understand the
language well’, and they ‘find it tough to understand English grammar’. The next major group feels that their problem is that they ‘do not understand the language well’ and that they find it ‘tough to write in English’ or ‘fear to write in English’ (14.29%). See chapter 3, Table C of Q.19.

There are three students who mentioned about their three fold problems in learning English. 66 percent stated the problems as they ‘do not understand the language well, find it hard to understand English grammar and find it tough to write in English or fear to write in English’ (66.67%). Refer to Chapter 3, Table D of Q.19.

There is also one student (male) who mentioned about facing four problems while learning English. The position is shown in the Table E of Q.19, Chapter 3.

**Analysis of the difficulties in learning English.**

From the various tables of question 19, it has become evident that certain difficulties are prominently common to majority of the learner respondents. The most common problem seems to be of understanding the language. When a learner respondent from class 9 or 10 says that he or she finds difficulty in understanding the language (target language-English), that too after learning it for a minimum of six to seven years, it brings forth many issues related to the English language learning and teaching scenario in Assam.

English is introduced at a very early stage. As discussed earlier, learning a second language at a very tender age has its own disadvantages. The major disadvantage is that the learners get thoroughly confused right at the beginning of their learning the language.

This point a finger at the English language curriculum designed for the pre-primary and the primary levels of the regional medium schools of Assam. When a child gets enrolled in ‘Ka Shreni’ or the pre-elementary level in a regional medium school, he or she has to learn the English language also along with Assamese and Numbers. For the fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination exercises colouring workbooks with conceptual drawings are provided. The text book for English is provided by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). The matter that they need to learn basically introduces them to the sounds of English. At this stage the learners are
not supposed to write anything in the second language English. For the conditioning of the child learners with the concepts and associated sounds, some teaching and learning materials are used like picture charts and tapes. The matter that the learners need to learn at this level is more or less satisfactory.

From ‘Ka Shreni’ the learners get promoted to Class 1. Here the question arises about the proper grading of the learning materials. The present text book prescribed for Class 1 is *Marigold Book One*, developed by NCERT, New Delhi and adopted by SCERT, Assam. The text book follows the guidelines of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005. But there remains a big gap area between the ‘Ka Shreni’ training and the matter that the learners need to learn in Class 1. Ideally and according to the Montessori Method of teaching, learners at this stage must be introduced to the vowel system. The next stage is to form individual words which is possible only by knowing the vowel sounds thoroughly. Sentence making is done at a later stage when the learner settles down with the word-making exercises.

But, in the Class 1 level, when the above-mentioned text is introduced, the learners find it tough to cope. Even teachers find it difficult to facilitate the learning process. This is because exercises with vowels and word-making simply do not exist. No proper instructions are given regarding the oral practices of vowel sounds and word-making. This results in confused learners who are being promoted to Class 2 where they would be expected to cope up with a higher level text.

In the present system learners are promoted to higher classes no matter what their academic performances are. English is learnt as the second language and their unsatisfactory performance is not given due importance. This confusion continues till the learners reach high school.

At the high school level teachers apply the same traditional methods to teach in the English language. In Classes 9 and 10, the English text is supported by another reader. The text includes grammar and composition exercises. Proper understanding builds the comprehending ability in a learner. If the learners managed to acquire the language correctly to a satisfactory extent then these texts would be of much help. But, when a learner is unable to understand the language properly even after learning it for six to seven years, his or her academic performance would be affected. This in
turn reduces the learners’ motivation to learn the language with enthusiasm.

The next major difficulty faced by learners in learning English is ‘writing in English’. By ‘writing’ the option in the questionnaire means constructing sentences in English. They find it tough to construct sentences and write them in English. Hence, it is not unusual for them to be afraid of writing in English.

Writing is a production skill. In fact, it is the most important productive activity for L2 learners to develop if they want to use the language for academic purposes. In most parts of the world, it is seen that writing is the most common medium for testing knowledge, including the knowledge of L2. In the regional medium schools of Assam also, this is the norm. Summative Examinations are being held at the end of sessions and their knowledge of L2 is tested through the writing skill just like any other content subject. In order to sail through the examinations, in this case the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) Examination, learners must display a high level of writing proficiency.

To attain proficiency in the writing skill, the learners must know how to construct correct sentences both grammatically and semantically. The productive activities for language use require some processes that need prior knowledge in certain areas. Comprehension is one production activity that all learners need to be adequately proficient in order to show satisfactory academic performance. In production activities, especially for comprehension of written or spoken language, prior knowledge of certain features become essential prerequisites. They are: vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax, and discourse structure to access words and combine them into phrases, clauses, and longer units of text. When an L2 learner’s knowledge in these areas of the target language (English) is too limited, he or she faces problems in production as well as interpretation of meaning.

In the regional medium schools of Assam, the content of the English syllabus forms the substance of information that the learner needs to communicate while writing or speaking. This leads us to “top-down processing”. “Prior knowledge of content is the substance of information that a writer or speaker wishes to communicate; knowledge of context accounts for writers’ and speakers’ ability to select from potential linguistic options those which are appropriate to a specific communicative
situation, including what should (or should not) be written or said next; prior knowledge of culture includes cultural conventions for knowledge use" (Saville-Troike, 2010:162).

When the learner respondents in this study points out writing or composition in English as an area of difficulty, it indicates that they also lack adequate prior knowledge in the other prerequisites mentioned above. It can be presumed that they (learners) also develop a fear for this production skill which is so essential for their academic proficiency.

The third difficulty that learners face while learning English is with grammar. They find it difficult to understand English grammar. Those learners who have pointed out multiple difficulties in learning English have this option 'difficult to understand English grammar' common in their list of difficulties.

To attempt a causal analysis of the problem of learners’ difficulty with grammar, a brief description on the components of language knowledge is necessary. Traditionally, linguists have divided language into five components for purposes of description and analysis. The “human accomplishment” of learning languages, according to Saville-Troike (2010), is a remarkable feat when we consider the list of the areas of knowledge which every L1 or L2 learner must acquire at the different levels. The levels or components are (Saville-Troike, 2010):

- **Lexicon (or vocabulary):** word meaning, pronunciation (and spelling for written languages), grammatical category (part of speech), possible occurrence in combination with idioms.
- **Phonology (sound system):** Speech sounds that make a difference in meaning (phonemes); possible sequence of consonants and vowels (syllable structure); intonation patterns (stress, pitch, and duration); rhythmic patterns (pauses and stops).
- **Morphology (word structure):** parts of words that have meaning (morphemes); inflections that carry grammatical information (like number or tense); prefixes or suffixes that may be added to change the meaning of words or their grammatical category.
- **Syntax (grammar):** word order; agreement between sentence elements (for example, number agreement between subject and verb); ways to form questions, to negate assertions, and to focus or structure information within sentences.
• Discourse: ways to connect sentences, and to organize information across sentence boundaries; structures for telling stories, engaging in conversations, and so on; scripts for interacting and for events.

The word ‘grammar’ that has been mentioned above is actually the language component called ‘syntax’. The acquisition of the syntax of another language is an issue of internalizing new construction patterns, generative rules, different parameters for innate principles, or collocational probabilities and constraints. The language learning process, especially the second language, “begins with recognizing that sentences are more than just combinations of words, and that every language has specific limits and requirements on the possible orders and arrangement of elements” (Saville-Troike, 2010:145). The problem with grammar that the learner respondents mentioned in this study also include these above mentioned aspects. All languages have structures for making statements, asking questions, and denying assertions. Sentences in all languages consist of a subject and a predicate; and predicates consist of a verb, or a verb and one or two objects, plus other possible phrases expressing such things as time, place, frequency, manner, goal, source, or purpose. The Assamese language and English also have these common elements in sentences. But the order of elements, and degree of flexibility in their order, may differ radically. Linguists classify languages according the typical order in which the components (subject, verb and object) occur. Considering S for subject, V for verb and O for object, the different classifications are given:
  • S+V+O
  • S+O+V
  • V+S+O

The sentence structure in the English language follows the order S+V+O. But the Assamese language sentence structure follows the order S+O+V.

While learning a second language, a learner must get used to the sentence order of the second language, in this case English, since it differs from Assamese. The orders given above are the most common ones statistically, but many languages have ways to vary the basic order to some extent for various reasons, including focus, information structure, and style. English is fairly rigid regarding variation in order.
English, the S+V+O (subject+ verb+ object) order is essential in distinguishing subjects and objects. For example, in the sentence ‘William hit Peter’, we know from the order that William initiated the action and that Peter was the one injured. If this order is reversed to ‘Peter hit William’, the opposite inference is made.

The difference in the sentence structure is perhaps one reason why Assamese speaking learner respondents find it difficult to learn grammar. Contrastive analysis helps in anticipating some of the problems and difficulties that a second language learner may face in trying to acquire a second language.

Another difficulty mentioned by the respondents in the learning of English is ‘teacher explains in a complicated manner’. This particular problem is directly related to the domain of English Language Teaching. Its presence in the list of difficulties suggests that there exist some problems with the training of teachers.

Teachers’ primary role is that of facilitators in the learning process. In the process of second language learning the teacher’s role gets multiplied. This is because the teacher is expected to know the first language of the learner (in this study the first language is Assamese) so that he or she can find out the areas of difficulty in learning the target language English. Knowing the difficult areas will help the teacher to prepare the lesson in advance and deliver the lesson in such a way that the learners are able to comprehend whatever has been taught.

Ideally it is important for teachers to pay individual attention to every learner and find out their problems and difficulties in learning English. But the classrooms in most of the schools are large with huge number of learners. Hence, it is difficult for the teachers to pay individual attention to every learner while teaching every lesson. To solve this problem the teacher must be able to do a needs-analysis of learners at different levels. This would help them make the lessons easier for the learners.

Adequate trainings from proper institutions and authorities would empower the teachers to become better facilitators in the teaching-learning process.

Question 20 comes next in this category of English language learning situation. This question is related to the area of difficulty as pointed out by the students.

Q.20) Which area do you find most difficult in your English curriculum?

In this question five options are given. They are:
Chapter 3, Table A of Q.20 shows the type of response regarding the difficult area in the curriculum. Single option response is shown by 72.41% of the respondents. The second group of respondents who chose two options constitute 22.41% of the study group and a very tiny section (2.87%) of the respondents pointed out three options.

Among the respondents who gave single option answers, majority of the students (47.20%) find it tough when told to speak in English or to make conversation in English. They are followed by the group who find English Grammar tough (25.60%). A considerable percentage of the students (10.40%) also find it hard to write in English. Refer to Chapter 3, Q.20 Table B.

In the Table C of Q.20, Chapter 3, the response of the students who mentioned dual problem areas in their curriculum is shown. The most frequently mentioned areas are ‘learning grammar and when told to speak in English’ (25.64%). The second group mentioned the combination of ‘grammar and writing in English’ (15.38%). The third group (12.82%) talks about ‘prose and speaking in English’ as tough. The fourth position (10.26%) is shared by three groups and their options are ‘Grammar and poetry’, ‘poetry and speaking in English’ and ‘poetry and prose’.

A total of four students mentioned three branches which they find very tough. All branches occur in combination and with equal importance of 25% each. The options are: ‘Grammar, Poetry, and speaking’, ‘Grammar, Prose, and speaking’, ‘Writing, Poetry, and Prose’, and ‘Grammar, Writing, and Prose’. Refer to Chapter 3, Q.20 Table D.

**Analysis of responses:**

From the responses of question 20, it becomes clear that learners find difficulty in all the areas of the curriculum. The area that receives highest votes is ‘Speaking in English’. This production skill of speaking poses the greatest threat to the learners.
Speaking is a production skill. It is an important area of activity for L2 learners if they will be using the language for interpersonal purposes. For speech production certain amount of prior language knowledge in the target language is necessary. The language knowledge involved in bottom-up processes for speech production includes:

- appropriate vocabulary,
- features of pronunciation,
- grammatical patterns that will convey intended meaning, and
- understanding of discourse structures that will provide cohesion and coherence within a conversation or other spoken communicative event.

On the other hand, the top-down processes involved in the production of speech also require certain prior knowledge. They are:

- Content knowledge about a topic,
- Cultural knowledge informing determination of proprieties and providing macrosocial context for expression,
- Knowledge of microsocial context.

The learners of the target language English in the regional medium schools in Assam consider the speaking activities as difficult. For these learners this production skill needs to be used in very limited contexts; interaction with the English teacher during the class hours and the oral tests included in the curriculum are the two contexts where they use their speaking skill in the language.

According to the linguistic framework of functionalism9, the development of learner language is very important and this learner language must be “motivated and furthered by interactive language use”(Saville-Troike, 2010:166). The psychological approaches offer the explanation that L2 speaking proficiency is mainly a degree of automaticity in processing. The social approach to second language learning relates speaking proficiency to L2 variation. It explores how contextual dimensions influence quality of learner language production. The social perspective attributes fluency and accuracy in speech activities to the amount of attention the speaker pays to linguistic form, intellectual demands of a task, level of formality, setting of interaction, relationship of speaker and addressee, and other linguistic contexts.

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Going back to the learner context of this study, the above mentioned factors do affect the learners’ proficiency in speaking. These approaches all talk about the development of the learner’s language and interaction. But the learner respondents of this study do not get enough scope to practice the speaking skill. The corollary of the above approaches is that lesser the practice of speaking and interaction, the lesser the proficiency. This is the causal explanation for the difficulty faced by the learners in attaining proficiency in the speaking skill.

Grammar is one area which the students finds very tough. This is also reflected in the teacher’s view on the aspect of English which the pupil finds very tough (To be analysed with the teachers’ schedule). The analysis of the previous question 19 also brings forth the fact that grammar is an area of concern among the learner respondents.

‘Composition in English’ is the next difficult area in the curriculum. This is a production skill and learners often find it difficult to compose sentences in English. In fact, it is the most important productive activity for L2 learners to develop if they want to use the language for academic purposes. In most parts of the world, it is seen that writing is the most common medium for testing knowledge, including the knowledge of L2. In the regional medium schools of Assam also, this is the norm. Summative Examinations are being held at the end of sessions and their knowledge of L2 is tested through the writing skill just like any other content subject. In order to sail through the examinations, in this case the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) Examination, learners must display a high level of writing proficiency.

To attain proficiency in the writing skill, the learners must know how to construct correct sentences both grammatically and semantically. The productive activities for language use require some processes that need prior knowledge in certain areas. Comprehension is one production activity that all learners need to be adequately proficient in order to show satisfactory academic performance. In production activities, especially for comprehension of written or spoken language, prior knowledge of certain features become essential prerequisites. They are vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax, and discourse structure to access words and combine them into phrases, clauses, and longer units of text. When an L2 learner’s knowledge in these areas of the target language (English) is too limited, he or she faces problems
in production as well as interpretation of meaning.

Poetry and Prose also occur in the list of difficult areas. This is once again associated with the teaching of English and training of teachers.

At present, the type of syllabus that is followed in classes 9 and 10 of the schools under the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA) is the Content based syllabus.

The Content-Based Teaching:

In the twentieth century, the Communicative Language Teaching Approach has become popular worldwide. One of the very popular communicative approaches is the Content-Based Teaching Approach (CBT). The CBT is used in many English speaking countries around the world. It is an approach to second language teaching in which teaching is organized around the information or content that the learners are meant to acquire. The CBT syllabus prescribes a list of contents that are to be taught. The contents include prose pieces, essays, poems, drama, novels, etc. The learners are expected to do certain comprehension exercises after the contents are learnt. Some amount of grammar is also included in the contents’ list.

The CBT approach is grounded on 2 main principles- a) People learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself. b) CBT better reflects learners’ needs for learning a second language.

The content is the substance or subject matter prescribed. In this kind of language teaching initiative, priority is given to meanings.

The Communicative language teaching and the Content Based Instruction (CBI) approach started with the aim that classrooms should focus on real communication and exchange of information. The language that is being taught is used to present the subject matter and the learners learn the language as a by-product of learning about real-world content.

The content based teaching approach pre-supposes the inclusion of poems and prose pieces in the syllabus. Ideally, to teach poetry, the teacher has to follow certain steps involving the learners. The steps include thorough reading of the poem. The teacher first reads it for the learners to give the phonological effect. The learners are to be encouraged to read it on their own and extract meanings. The teacher’s role here
is to help learners analyze the various components like imageries, diction, syntax and rhythm, and finally help them arrive at an interpretation of the poem on their own. Similarly, there are a few such simple steps for the interpretation of prose pieces, with the help of which teachers can empower learners to learn the English language properly.

One of the findings of this study is that learners find prose and poetry difficult to interpret. The teaching and learning of poetry and prose in the regional medium schools vary a lot from the ideal methods mentioned above.

Due to various reasons teachers paraphrase the entire poem or the prose piece. Learners do not work hard to extract their own meanings. They simply learn by heart the notes given in the class or the answers given in the bazaar notes. Those learners, who put in some effort to understand the poems and prose pieces well before attempting to write, find these two branches of the English language relatively easier.

The last question in the category of English language learning is question 21. It is about the area of liking or preference in learning English, as stated by the learner respondents.

**Q.21) What do you like most in your English curriculum?**

Five options are given and they are:

- Grammar
- Poetry
- Prose Lessons
- Writing/ composition
- When asked to speak in English.

The students were asked about the branches that they like most about the English curriculum in schools. Majority (53.71%) of them answered about liking single branches or activities while 30.29% expressed their liking of two branches or activities followed by 12% who stated three branches or activities that they like most. The details are shown in Chapter 3, Q.21 Table-A.

Table B of question 21 in Chapter 3 shows the single option preferences chosen by the respondents. 39.79% of the students who referred one branch or activity as their liking expressed that they like ‘English Grammar’. The second group (22.58%)
stated that they like ‘writing in English’ or composition. A few of them like prose and poetry.

Those who referred two areas, 24.53% stated ‘grammar and poetry’ as their best choice. While for 16.98%, it is ‘grammar and prose’ and for 15.09% it is ‘grammar and writing in English’. Refer to Chapter 3, Q.21 Table C.

Question 21, Table D in Chapter 3 brings out the triple options choice of the areas of liking in the English curriculum by the learner respondents. Most of them (33.33%) like ‘Grammar-Poetry-Prose’. The second group (14.29%) prefers ‘Poetry-Prose-Composition in English’. The third group (9.52%) consists of four combinations: ‘Grammar-Prose-Composition’, ‘Grammar-Prose-Speaking in English’, ‘Grammar-Composition-Speaking’, and ‘Grammar-Poetry-Composition’.

Table E of Q.21 in Chapter 3 shows the areas of liking in the English curriculum by the respondents who chose four options. The first group (50%) chooses the combination ‘Grammar-poetry-Writing-Speaking’. The second group (25%) consists of two combinations: ‘Grammar-Prose-Writing-Speaking’ and ‘Grammar-Poetry-Prose-Speaking in English’.

Analysis of the areas of preference in the curriculum:

From the various tables of question 21(Chapter 3), the likings of the learner respondents come to light. The area which is preferred by most of the respondents is Grammar. It seems that the learners enjoy learning grammar more than any other aspect. However, this preference is in contrast with the reports of the tables of questions 19 and 20 where we see that learning English Grammar is the most difficult area in the curriculum. A cursory reading would show that these tables are providing contradictory results, because, how can learners like a particular area and find it difficult also at the same time.

• That learners find grammar difficult, is further proved in the third schedule of the learners. In the free composition of that schedule (Q.5), learners were at a very low stage of proficiency. Most of their compositions had faulty grammatical structures. In the first questionnaire for the learners also, question 19 and question 20 deal with the areas of difficulty. And, the response of these two questions clearly indicate that grammar is the most common area of difficulty among the learner respondents. In
such a state of affairs, it becomes hard to believe when learners point out grammar as the area of liking. One obvious reason for liking grammar could be that teachers teach grammar with care. The teachers are aware that learners find grammar difficult (this has been proved in all the schedules). Hence, they take extra care to teach this component of the English language.

- Another reason for the learners' liking of grammar could be that they find it easy to score. The question patterns for testing the component called grammar, in the regional medium schools in Assam, are objective. Most of the questions are in the form of cloze tests (fill in the blanks) and questions with directions given for the learners. With adequate practice learners can actually score very good marks, making it a favourite subject. The consideration of the receptive and productive skills of the learners also give a different interpretation to this issue which has been dealt with in Chapter 5.

- The next area of liking is writing compositions in English. This again is contradictory as the question no. 5 of schedule 3 for learners proves. Most of the constructions are faulty. A detailed discussion on it will be done when the error analysis would be dealt with. Compositions in English as an area of difficulty occur in questions 19 and 20 of the learners' questionnaire. In such a state of affairs, it is amazing to see that learners mention compositions in English as an area of liking. The creative aspect associated with the composition part makes it appealing to the learners. But writing is a production skill and as discussed earlier, to write something prior knowledge of certain aspects is very essential like: vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax, and discourse structure to access words and combine them into phrases, clauses, and longer units of text. When an L2 learner's knowledge in these areas of the target language (English) is too limited, he or she faces problems in production as well as interpretation of meaning.

Prose and Poetry are also marked as areas of preference by the learner respondents. In an earlier table, prose and poetry featured as areas of difficulty among these same learner respondents. Adequate analysis was also given.

Among the other areas of preference, 'speaking in English' is preferred by the smallest group. This aspect of the curriculum also came up as an area of difficulty in
It is a strange phenomenon that areas of difficulty marked by the learner respondents as problem areas are also marked as areas of liking by the same learner respondents simultaneously. It is a matter to ponder upon as to why this happens.

Whenever, any learner finds any area of the language easy to learn, it implies that the learner is motivated enough to learn it. Finding an area easy would also mean that the learner has put in enough effort to learn it. The teacher's personal charisma is an important factor to make lessons interesting for the learners. If the teachers are well prepared for the lessons, their performance is reflected in the understanding of the lesson by the learners which in turn make things easier.

4.2.3 (III) Linguistic environment

The next category in the learners schedule is about the linguistic environment which surrounds the learner of English. This environment creates the context in which the target language is learned. This category takes us to the domain of sociolinguistics and the causes that provide a favourable or uncongenial environment for learning a second language. Questions 4, 14, 15, 16, and 17 come under this category.

Q.4) What is your home language? Or in which language do you speak at home?

The response to this question shows that there are respondents from eight different language backgrounds. They are- Assamese, Goalporia, Bihari, Adibasi, Tea-tribe, Bengali, Mishing, and Nepali. A small group of learners (1.73%) did not respond to this question. Among these linguistic groups respondents from the Assamese language are the highest and they constitute 68.96% of the whole lot. This makes Assamese the dominant language in this study group. The table (name) in chapter 3 shows the entire distribution of the linguistic composition of the sample.

The presence of eight different home languages in this small study group of 174 respondents is a very prominent landmark presenting the multilingual and multicultural mosaic of Assam. In Assam, there are more than 80 social groups who either have their own languages or speak varieties of some other languages.

Though these languages are present in our study group, yet the respondent students are proficient enough in the Assamese language which is the ambient language. Being
the ambient language, Assamese is accessible in the sociolinguistic environment and these respondents get ample scope to interact in the same. The learner respondents being regular students in the regional (Assamese) medium schools are a proof that they possess native-like proficiency in both receptive and productive skills in the Assamese language. Hence, their presence in our canvas is logical.

The presence of eight different home languages in this study denotes other facts about the linguistic environment of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

Q.14) Do you get to listen to conversations in English? If yes, from what source?

For this question six options are given. They are:

- From the teacher in the English Language classroom.
- At home.
- From friends.
- Television.
- Other sources.
- Do not get to listen at all.

Students were asked whether they get chances to hear conversation in English. Most of the students (52.30%) disclosed that two sources where they hear conversation in English. 29.89% of them stated only one source while 13.79% stated three sources. Refer to Chapter 3, Q.14, Table A.

For majority of the respondents, (80.77%) the only source of listening to English conversation is their English classes. In most of the cases only one session a day covering 45 minutes is marked for English classes and that is the only time they listen to English conversation. Some 7.69 percent of the students get chances to listen to English conversation by watching TV and slightly lesser than that number (5.77%) hear English conversation through their friends (Refer to Chapter 3, Q.14 Table B). Evidently, none of the sources are strong enough to have any significant impact on the students learning English.

The few students who mentioned two sources available to them for listening to English conversation comprise 52.30 percent of the sample. 79.34 percent of these students mentioned the sources as ‘English class room and TV’ while 13.04 percent mentioned these as ‘English class room and their friends’. In most of the double
sources ‘English class room’ is mentioned as the common source. (For details refer to Chapter 3, Q.14, Table C).

Similarly, majority (45.84%) of those who mentioned three sources named ‘English class room- friends-TV’ as the main sources followed by the group who mentioned ‘English class room-home-TV’ (33.33%). (Chapter 3, Q.14, Table D).

There are also negligible numbers of students who mentioned multiple sources, the details of which are presented in the Table E of Q.14, Chapter 3. It reveals from the above situations that no specific care has been taken to impart the language to the learners. ‘English classroom-Friends-TV-others’ (57.14%) is the response of the first group who preferred multiple choices of the curriculum. The second group (42.86%) chose the combination of ‘Classroom-home-Friends-TV’.

The common answer from most of the respondents is that they get to hear conversations in English only in the English Classroom from the English language teacher.

Television seems to be the second popular source where the learner respondents get to hear English.

A tiny group of respondents mentioned that they also get to hear English from friends and also at home.

The next question in this category is question 15.

Q.15) Do you get any chance to speak in English? If yes, where or with whom?

In this question also six options are given. They are as follows:

a) With the teacher in the English language classroom.
b) At home.
c) With friends.
d) Other situations.
e) Never get any chance.
f) Sometimes use a few words.

While listening to the conversation in the target language is one aspect of the learning process, and getting scope for speaking the language is another aspect. The students under survey are asked whether they get any chances to speak English and if so where and when? All the respondents replied positively. 45.40 percent of them
stated single situation while 43.68 per cent mentioned a combination of two situations followed by 9.77 percent who mentioned a combination of three situations. The details are presented in the Table A to Q.15 in Chapter 3.

Those students who mentioned single situation, majority (49.37%) belonged to the group who stated to have got chances to speak English with English teacher in the classroom. They are followed by the group who sometimes get chances to speak one or two words (26.58%). There are few students (13.92%) who get chances to speak English with their friends and fewer than them (07.60%) are the group who mentioned home as one situation. (Chapter 3, Q.15 Table B).

In the situation where the students mentioned two situations in which they get chances to speak in English, the highest frequency occurred in respect of the group which said ‘With English teacher in the class room- and with friends’ consisting of 55.26 percent. They are followed by the group (25%), ‘With English teacher in the class room- and sometimes one or two words’. From this it appears that class room is the only effective source from where the learners of English get inputs of all kinds. (Chapter 3, Q.15, Table C).

The students who mentioned three situation in which they are able to speak English, (Chapter 3, Q.15, Table D), also identified ‘with teacher in the class room’ as the main sources and along with it the other two sources. Highest numbers of students mentioned ‘With English teacher in the class room- with friends- and in other situations’ as the three main sources.

The same situation of class room is repeated when the two students who mentioned four sources in which they can speak in English (Chapter3, Q.15 Table E).

The next question in this category is question 16. It is about the use of English words in their regular speech.

Q.16) Do you use English words when you talk in your mother tongue?

In order to have an idea about using English words while speaking in mother tongue, the students under study are asked to reply a question to this extent.

It may be observed from the table to Q.16, Chapter 3, that as many as 89.08 percent students admitted using English words while speaking in mother tongue.

This question not only talks about the linguistic environment but also about other
issues like English language learning situation and attitude towards the language.

The other question that deals with the linguistic environment category is question 17. This question is an extension of the previous question no 16.

**Q.17) Do you use English words in your conversation? If yes, with whom?**

Four options were given for the learner respondents to answer. They are:

- a) With teachers.
- b) With friends.
- c) With family members.
- d) At other situations.

The responses to this question 17 are given in the table A, Q.17 in Chapter 3. Of the total respondents 50.57% of learners gave single option answers, which is followed by the dual options answers which constitutes 32.76% of the respondents.

Among the respondents who gave single option answers about using English words in their conversation, the majority group preferred to say that they use English words only with their friends (46.59%). This is followed by the group who uses English words in their conversation with their teachers (32.95%). But there is a variation in the pattern with the male respondents. More boys (40.42%) prefer to use English with teachers than girls (24.39%). Refer to Chapter 3, Q.17, Table B.

In the dual response table (Chapter 3, Q.17, Table C), the majority group (67.86%) opines that they use English words with both teachers and friends.

There was a small group of 25 respondents who selected three options. Among this group the majority (60%) preferred to use English words with teachers, friends and with family members (See Chapter 3, Q.17, Table D).

Only three respondents said that they use English words with all the four options given, that is, with teachers, friends, and family members and in other situations (Chapter 3, Q.17, Table E).

From the tables prepared for questions 16 and 17, it becomes clear that majority of the learner respondents use English words in their conversations or while conversing in their mother tongue. These respondents talked about four situations where they can use English words: with the English language teachers, friends, at home with family members and in other situations. Of course, teachers and friends are the more
popular situations.

Analysis of linguistic environment

Assam is a multicultural region with more than 80 social groups residing in the hills and plains. In this study group of 174 learner respondents from the Brahmaputra valley including 9 districts, eight home languages have been recorded. Of course, Assamese is the most dominant language. This multilingual mosaic has helped in making the linguistic environment in Assam tolerant towards all languages. In addition to all the other languages English has curved a niche for itself in this region. It is a second language and learners who are formally registered in the regional medium schools need to study this language right from the pre-elementary level up to the undergraduate level.

In Assam, as in the other Indian states, English has entered every sphere of life. Be it the sign boards on the road, the number plates on the vehicles, the receipts that we get in the stores, or any other item or product, English is the language that is popularly used. Whether it is the banking sector, or the legal sector or the corporate sphere, English is the language that has gained most popularity. Even in our domestic sphere, certain English words have supplanted the native words. Hence, for the learners of English in the regional medium schools of Assam, English is a familiar language. The learners are often seen using English words even without their conscious knowledge while talking to their friends or family members in their mother tongue.

English as a language is familiar in this social context. It has to be learnt as a second language by all school goers. But for the learners, the context in which English is learned is foreign. The learners are often seen using English words but even then English is a foreign language for them. This gets clear from the statistics about their scope to listen and converse in English. A very high percentage of learner respondents (80.77%) declared that the only source from where they get to listen to conversations in English is from the English teacher in the English classroom. This happens to be the only source for the majority of the respondents where they get a chance to converse in English. The forty-five minutes duration English class per day is not enough to master all the skills in English-receptive and productive.

Other sources where learners get to listen to and converse in English are from
the television, friends and family members. From the source of the television they can only listen and hone their receptive skills. Very few respondents say that they get a chance to listen and speak English at home or with friends.

The above discussion makes it clear that the linguistic environment of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam is very congenial for cross-linguistic influences to occur. The multilingual setting where English is learned, the confused learners, the short training durations of the teachers and their confusion about the needs analysis of the learners (discussed earlier), all point towards the potentiality of the cross-linguistic influences to make way into the production skills of the learners of English in Assam.

4.2.4 Learning Strategies:

The aim of this category is to find out whether the learners use any strategy to learn the target language English. Another relevant information that is being collected from this category is—whether the knowledge of the first language Assamese acts as a support base to learn the target language English. This category includes questions 12, 13, and 18.

Q.12) To understand English do you take the help of Assamese?

In other words, this question is framed with the purpose to know that whether the learner respondents take help of their prior knowledge of Assamese to understand the texts, utterances, or any other writings in English.

In order to assess the students' perception about taking help of mother tongue while learning English, they were asked whether they take help of their knowledge in Assamese while understanding English. 95.40% percent of the respondents replied positively. Only a negligible percentage of respondents replied negatively (03.45%). Refer to the table to question 12 in Chapter 3.

The next question in this category is question 13.

Q.13) How do you translate from Assamese into English?

For this question the respondents are supposed to choose from among four options.

a) Conceptualize the answer in English.

b) Conceptualize the idea in Assamese and then translate into English.

c) Attempt to translate each word into English.
In reply to the question how they translate Assamese to English, 78.16 percent of the respondents replied adopting a single process, while 20.12 percent said to have adopted a combination of two processes. The details of the processes are shown in the Table-A to Q.13, Chapter 3.

Lado (1957: 2) while discussing ‘transfer’ expressed that ‘individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture’. This is also reflected in this study.

The Table B of Q.13, Chapter 3, shows the single option answers. As many as 66.18 percent respondents admitted that while translating Assamese sentences to English they first conceptualise the answer in Assamese and then only translates it to English. Followed by this is the category (16.18%) who attempts to translate a sentence word by word. Only 6.62 per cent expressed that in translation they conceptualise the idea in English itself.

Table C of Q.13 (Chapter 3) states the double choice answers of the learner respondents. Some of the student respondents disclosed that sometimes they also resort to more than one means of translating Assamese to English. Such 88.57 per cent students stated that they ‘first conceptualize the idea in Assamese and then they attempt to translate the sentence word by word’. 08.57 percent of them state that they frame the idea both in English and also in their mother tongue.

The next question in this category is question 18.

Q.18) It is easier to learn English only through Assamese. Do you agree?

The options to this question were:

a) Yes
b) No
c) Sometimes.

The students’ were asked about their perceptions regarding the learning of English with the support of mother tongue, and the findings demonstrate that 82.18 percent learners need the support of mother tongue in English classes and they believe that their mother tongue helps significantly in learning English. Refer to the table for
**Q.18 in Chapter 3.**  

**Analysis- cognitive strategies**  

The questions in this category deal with the cognitive strategies used by the learners to learn the second language English. The questions asked were: to understand English do they take the help of Assamese; how do the learners translate Assamese compositions into English or what strategy do they use; and is it easier to learn English through Assamese or in other words, is the support of Assamese (or the native language) necessary to learn English. The statistics of this study reveal that to **understand English 95.40 percent of the learner respondents take help of Assamese or their first language** (L1), and 82.18 percent admit that they need support of their L1 to understand the target language English. For activities like translations 66.18 percent respondents say that they first conceptualize the idea in their L1 Assamese and then translate it into English. Another group (it is a large group of 88.57%), who gave dual response to the question of translation strategy, admits that they also first conceptualize the idea in Assamese and then attempt to translate the sentence word by word.

The above statistical review projects that learners do need the support of the first language to learn the target language. **The L1 acts as a scaffolding device or a support base for the learning of English.** This takes us to the domain of learning strategies used by learners to acquire the target language. When the term ‘learning strategies’ is used, it refers to the behaviour and techniques that learners adopt in their efforts to learn L2.

Learners attempt different strategies to learn an L2. But all strategies are not equally effective. Some are “inherently more effective than others, and some more appropriate in particular contexts of learning or for individuals with differing aptitudes and learning styles” (Saville-Troike, 2010: 91).

O’Malley and Chamot (Chamot 1987) formulated a typology of language-learning strategies which has been of great help in Second Language Acquisition research. It talks about three main strategies:

- **Metacognitive Strategies:** These are those strategies which attempt to regulate language learning by planning and monitoring. For example- previewing a concept or
principle in anticipation of a learning activity; deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of input; rehearsing linguistic components which will be required for an upcoming language task; self-monitoring of progress and knowledge states.

- **Cognitive Strategies**: These strategies make use of direct analysis or synthesis of linguistic material. For example- repeating after a language model; translating from L1; remembering a new word in L2 by relating it to one that sounds the same in L1, or by creating vivid images; guessing meanings of new material through inferencing.

- **Social or Affective Strategies**: These strategies involve interaction with others. For example- seeking opportunities to interact with native speakers; working cooperatively with peers to obtain feedback or pool information; asking questions to obtain clarification; requesting repetition, explanation or examples.

The cognitive strategies are the most popular strategies that learners adopt in order learn the second language English. This fact is revealed in the statistics of this present study. The cognitive strategy adopted by the learner respondents is translating from the L1. The learners first conceptualize the idea in their L1 (Assamese) and then try to translate it into the target language English. Thus the L1 (Assamese) forms a scaffolding device in learning the L2 (English).

4.2.5 (V). **Learners’ attitude towards the target language:**

This category includes questions 16, 22, 23, 24. In this category the questions deal with the attitude of the learners towards the target language English and also the reason for the relevance of learning this language. This will help in learning the source of motivation of the English language learners in Assam.

The next question in this category is question 16. It is about the use of English words in their regular speech.

**Q.16) Do you use English words when you talk in your mother tongue?**

In order to have an idea about using English words while speaking in mother tongue, the students under study are asked to reply a question to this extent.

It may be observed from the table to Q.16, Chapter 3, that as many as 89.08 percent students admitted using English words while speaking in mother tongue.

This question talks about the linguistic environment and about issues like English language learning situation and attitude towards the language.

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Question 22 is the next question in this category. This question directly reveals the attitude of the learners towards the Target language English.

**Q.22) Do you think that the English language is an important subject?**

The options provided for this question are:

a) Yes
b) No
c) Somewhat necessary.
d) There is no way out but to learn the language.

The students were asked whether they think English as an important subject. 96.55 per cent of the students consider that English is really an important subject while 1.15 per cent on an average believes that it is not or somewhat necessary or necessary because there is no way out. Refer to Q.22, Table A, Chapter 3.

Table B of Q. 22, Chapter 3, shows the double option answers of the respondents regarding the importance of the English language. The majority (60%) of these learners pointed out that the ‘English language is important and there is no way out but to learn it’. The other group consisting of the remaining 40% commented that ‘the English language is important and somewhat necessary’ for them.

From the analysis of the tables of question 22, it becomes clearly evident that the learners consider the English language as important. Some of them even consider that there is no way out but to learn the English language. These learners feel that there is a compulsion associated with the learning of the language. It is an indicator that the society associates much importance to the language. To know the reasons for such relevance associated with English, it becomes necessary to analyse question 23 of the learners’ schedule.

The next question in this category is question 23. This question is an extension of question 22. Question 23 deals with the reasons why they think English is important.

**Q.23) If you think English is important, what makes it important?**

For this question six options are given. They are:

a) To pass the matriculation exam somehow.
b) To speak the English language better.
c) To speak and write English better.
d) For better future career and jobs.
e) No need to learn the language.
f) To understand books in English and articles better.

The students were asked about the reasons for thinking English as an important subject. 68.39 percent stated one reason. 21.26 per cent stated two reasons and 8.045 per cent stated three reasons. Refer to Chapter 3, Q.23 Table A.

Of the students who stated one reason in favour of studying English, majority i.e. 60.50 per cent stated that it is required for ‘having a good career and getting a job’. 32.78 per cent stated that it is required for being able to ‘speak and write English well’. The details are presented in the table B of Q.23 in Chapter 3. A total of 2 students also mentioned that English is also necessary to pass the H.S.L.C. Examination somehow.

Of the students who gave a combination of two reasons as to why studying English is important, 45.95 per cent stated their reason as ‘to write and speak English well- and to have a good career and get a job in future’. This group constitutes the highest percentage in this category. This is followed by the group who stated ‘to speak English well- and to have a good career and get a job in future’. This group constitutes 24.32 per cent which is followed by the group who gives the reasons ‘to speak English well- and to write and speak English well’ (16.21%). Refer to Table C, Q. 23, Chapter 3.

There are also other two categories of students who stated a combination of three and four reasons for considering English as important. Among those who stated three reasons, the majority group (42.86%) stated ‘to speak English well- to write English well- and to have a good career and a good job in future’. The details are shown in Table D, Q.23, Chapter 3.

The reasons that surface from the responses of this question (Why is English necessary?) are ‘to get a job in future and have a good career’, ‘to write and speak English well’, and ‘pass the H.S.L.C. Examination’.

The utility angle associated with the English language makes it important in the society. Right from the days of its introduction in India, the English language always had a higher position in society. It may be due to its position as the language of the rulers, the British. Later on, after India’s independence, this language became the
language of higher education and administration. For all these and various other reasons English has gained a stature of great social importance.

The last question in this category is Question 24. The learners need to tell about their subject preferences.

**Q.24) Name the three favourite subjects in your syllabus.**

Students were asked to mention three subjects which they like most. The major group (21.85%) gave the combination ‘English-Science-Maths’. But this combination is not very popular among the girls. Maximum numbers of girl students (21.91%) like the combination ‘English-Social Studies-Assamese’ followed by the group (20.56%) which likes ‘English-Science-Assamese’. The second major group (16.67%) chose the combination ‘English-Social Studies-Assamese’. The findings are presented in Chapter 3, Table to Q.24. A total of sixteen combinations came up.

The analysis of question 24 makes it clear that English is one of the favourite subjects among the majority of the learner respondents.

**Analysis of the category of ‘attitude of learners towards English’:**

Learners’ attitude towards the target language, English, is one of the major motivating factors in acquiring the language. When the attitude of the learners regarding the English language is considered, the societal position of English also needs to be considered along with it. Right from the days of its introduction in India, the English language always had a higher position in society. It may be due to its position as the language of the rulers, the British. Later on, after India’s independence, this language became the language of higher education and administration. For all these and various other reasons English has gained a stature of great social importance.

The present system of allowing learners to get promoted into the higher standard without considering their performance at the summative tests needs reconsideration and in-depth pondering. Learners’ self motivation towards putting in the right effort to learn English gets dimmed. They tend to become complacent because however low they score in the exams, they will definitely get promoted into the next standard. Empirical field survey shows that passing exams and getting promoted into the next standard is one of the most important motivating factors in learning English. Of course,
this factor is more commonly seen among the learners who come from illiterate backgrounds where they could be considered as the first generation to get formal schooling. This is true to both urban and rural backgrounds. But exceptions cannot be denied and learners from absolutely illiterate backgrounds are seen adequately motivated to learn the language and attain a satisfactory level of proficiency in the target language.

Attitude of the learners towards the English language, as per the statistics revealed in this study, is that, English has to be learned as it is the tool that will help in shaping their career. This attitude is best related when Krishnaswamy and Sriraman’s long-range goals of teaching English in India are considered. They talk about three objectives:

a) To provide mobility (through the utilitarian function).

b) A vehicle of modernization (through the interactive function of English).

c) The projection principle (the interpretative function of English helps in projecting our values).

4.3 Questionnaire for the teachers of English

To know about the general background and training of teachers and to know about the learners’ evaluation by the teachers, another questionnaire was prepared for the purpose. This questionnaire was to be filled by the teachers who are responsible for teaching the English language to the learner respondents of this study. These teachers teach the English language to the learners in their respective schools from classes 6 to 10.

The first part of the questionnaire gives us the language teachers’ background. There is a column where the teachers need to mention about the level or standard in which they teach English. The table with the similar name presents the details in Chapter 3.

There were 64 teacher respondents in this study group. Among them the majority of the teachers (22 teachers) teach in classes IX and X. The rest of the teachers, some teach in class X, some in class IX, or VIII or VII.

The next relevant question regarding the teachers’ background is about their training.
Q.b) What was your major subject in BA or MA?

In the process of learning a second language, listening to conversations in that language has great impact. But having such chances are rare in case of students in the regional medium schools. This is because they learn the target language English in their local environment where their parents or siblings very rarely converse in English. Even, it was found that the teachers who teach the target language are mostly from regional medium background and many of them are not from the literature stream rather from social science stream. For the details of the teachers, refer to Chapter 3, Q.b) Table A.

Among the group of 64 teacher respondents, only 36 teachers (56.26%) had English as the main subject in their BA or MA courses. The rest are from social science background.

The next question talks about the specific language teaching training that are meant for the teachers of English.

Q.c) Did you undergo any special training on English teaching?

In the Table-B, Q.c, Chapter 3, the training status of the teachers are shown. It may be observed from the table that all the teachers are not trained to teach English. Only 62.50 percent of the teacher respondents (40 teachers) have undergone training of some kind. The rest, 24 teachers (37.50%), answers in the negative regarding trainings.

The next question is an extension of the previous question. This question ‘(d)’ deals with the training details of teachers.

Q.d) If you have any training, where did you get it from and what was the duration of the training?

The Table C with Q. d) in Chapter 3 gives us a detail of the type of training attended by the teacher respondents of English. Among the 40 trained teachers, 11 attended the 1 year training programme, and 4 teachers attended the 30 days programme, and only 1 attended 15 days programme. The rest 17 teachers attended trainings with very short durations. 7 teachers did not mention about attending any trainings.

The teachers schedule also brings to light the areas of difficulty in learning English. This category includes questions e), h), and i).
Q.h) What do you think are the reasons if the learners find the English language difficult?

The answer to this question becomes clear in the table with question (h) of the teachers’ schedule. Ten reasons have been mentioned by the teacher respondents. Among those reasons, some of them have been repeated several times. On the basis of the frequency of occurrence of the statement, an attempt has been made to find out the most nagging reasons that make the learning of English tough for the learners.

**Reasons given by teachers on finding English difficult:**

- The statement that occurred most frequently (48 times) is: ‘Learners are weak in Grammar and they find it difficult to learn and understand Grammar’.
- The statement ‘learners do not understand English’ occurs 33 times.
- The reasons ‘learners have problems in writing and speaking in English’ and ‘learners’ vocabulary is poor’ occurs 32 times.
- Two reasons occupy the fourth position and they are: ‘basic was not taught properly at the elementary and middle school levels’, and ‘students generally find English very tough’. The other reasons are:
  - ‘reading and speaking problem’ (in English),
  - ‘students are not interested’ (to learn the language or is it to pay attention or the teaching methods, motivation problem),
  - ‘Pronunciation is not correct’,
  - ‘Study time is short’.

Q.e) When teaching English, what difficulties do you notice that are being faced by the learners?

The table with question (e) of the teachers’ schedule (given in Chapter 3) will show the difficulties faced by the learners according to the teachers. The difficulties faced by the learners in learning English, according to the teachers are almost similar to the reasons for finding the language difficult. On the basis of the frequency of the occurrence of the statements given by teachers, an attempt has been made to assess the difficulties faced by the learners in learning the English language according to the teachers of English in their respective schools.

(164)
Q.i) Which area do you think is the most difficult area for learners when they learn the English language?

As has been proved by the previous tables, Grammar is one area which learners find very tough. The table to Q.i) proves it again.

This is also reflected in the teacher's view on the aspect of English which the pupil finds very tough. This is presented in the table below:

The table to Q.i) of the teachers' schedule reveals that leaving aside the activities like speaking, among the branches Grammar is the one area which the teachers have frequently stated as the problem area. Of course, the area that learners find most difficult is speaking (it occurs 49 times in the table for Q.i; refer to chapter 3). Speaking is a productive skill and it is a common phenomenon for most learners of second language to find the productive skills tougher than the receptive skills. But from the various other tables of the learners' and teachers' manual, Grammar recurs as the tough area.

The teachers have also stated during the survey that Grammar is also main reason why pupils find English tough. This view has already been proved in the table for question (h).

The teachers' schedule highlights another important area. Questions (f) and (g) reflect the attitude of the learners towards the English language.

Q.f) What do you think is the attitude of the learners regarding the English language?

According the teachers learners show different kind of attitudes regarding the English language. The interest range varies from school to school and from area to area. The answer to this question gets clear from the next associated question (g).

Q.g) What percentage of learners do you think show enthusiasm regarding the learning of English?

Teachers talked about various percentages. The table for Q. g) will make it clear. On the basis of the frequency of occurrence of the statement by the teachers, the percentage of students taking interest in learning English is 20% (the statement occurs 13 times). Nine teachers (this group comes second) say that 'most' of the learners are interested in learning English. But the next figure that comes third occurs 7 times and it says that more than 80 percent students are interested in learning English.
The last question in the teachers schedule is about using other materials like reference books to teach English. Most of the teachers answered that they use only the prescribed texts. Only a few said that they use other reference materials to teach the language.

**Analysis of teachers’ schedule:**

For this study 64 respondent teachers of English from the same schools were interviewed through a questionnaire. These respondent teachers are from both rural and urban background and they teach the respondent students of this study. Statistics reveal that almost all these teachers have done their schooling in the regional medium (Assamese) background. Only 36 teachers (56.26%) had English as the main subject in their B.A. or M.A. course. The others are trained in the Social Sciences. Among the 64 teachers, 40 teachers (62.50%) have received some kind of formal training to teach the English language. Eleven teachers have undergone training of one year duration and 4 teachers have undergone 30 days training programmes. The rest of the trained teachers have received very short training programmes. The training schedule presented by the respondent teachers seems to lack adequacy because to teachers of second language need to undergo continuous trainings at regular intervals instead of a single training session.

English is being taught in the secondary schools as a second language. The relevance of learning this language in our society has already been mentioned several times during the course of this study analysis. Rather than a mere language, English is a tool in today’s context. It is very necessary that the learners become conceptually clear and thorough in this language. For this the teachers of English need to be properly trained to facilitate the learning process. The inadequately trained teachers are unable to clear the doubts of the learners which results in the confusion among the learners regarding the basic concepts of the language. These teachers are also not able to analyze the needs of the learners. Another inadequacy noticed from the teachers’ responses is that very few teachers use any reference material. Most of the teachers use only the prescribed texts. The few teachers who use reference books consult books on grammar and composition. This revelation points out that learners are not trained to comprehend other materials in the English language apart from their
academic texts.

All these confusions enhance the cross-linguistic influences to act up on the learning of the second language English by the learners.

The teachers' schedule further reveals their attitude about the learners and their difficulties. According to the teachers most of the learners have problems with grammar. They find it difficult to understand grammar as well as the language. As such, their vocabulary remains poor and they have problems with both the productive skills—writing and speaking. The respondent teachers believe that the learners face these problems because they have been promoted to the higher classes without the basic concepts being cleared. Had these problems been addressed right from the beginning, it would have been different.

Regarding the attitude of the learners towards the language, most of the teachers opine that they feel the English language is very essential to have a successful career. The teachers' opinion about the learners' motivation to learn English is also satisfactory. But the recent policy to promote learners to higher classes without considering their academic performance in English has made a section of the learners complacent. This has affected their motivation level negatively.

4.4 Worksheet (Learners' Schedule)

Along with the learners' questionnaire a worksheet has been given for the learners. For the sake of convenience this schedule is also referred to as the Learners' Schedule 3. It contains five exercises. This worksheet was designed to test the learners' proficiency level in the linguistic category of verbs which in turn will enable us to detect their error level in the English Tense System.

The table for 'total marks' for the questions in the worksheet with the learners' schedule in Chapter 3, will show the marks obtained by the learner respondents in the various exercises.

This table indicates that maximum number (10.92%) of learner respondents both, female and male, scored 16 marks out of 25. One learner obtained zero out of 25 and, four learners scored full marks (25 out of 25). It is interesting to know that the learner scoring zero is a female and the four learners who scored full marks are also girls. No boys scored zero and none of them obtained full marks.
An attempt was made to understand which component of the English curriculum is found tough by the students. 72.41 percent of the students mentioned a single component as tough while 22.41 percent mentioned two tough components. And the common component declared as tough to learn is Grammar.

The above situation is reflected in the performance of the students in the exercise on grammar and composition given to each one of them. It can be said that they have fair idea about the verb as majority of them could correctly identify the verbs. The score of the student respondents on the question of verb identification is presented in the table for Q1, Schedule 3, Chapter 3.

4.4.1(Q1) Underline the verbs.

It may be observed that as much as 88.52 percent could score full marks in the question (Q.1) which asked for the identification of the verbs in the sentence. However, when it comes to identifying the correct form of verbs, with reference to tense, majority of them failed. Five cloze questions were given to the students to be filled up with the correct form of verbs. The scores have been presented in the table to Q.2) of the Worksheet tied along with the learners’ schedule (Refer to Chapter 3).

4.4.2 (Q.2) Fill in the blanks with the correct form of verbs.

When asked to write the correct form of verbs using the correct form of tense, the majority (28.16%) of the learners scored 1 out of 5 or (1/5) and the second major group (26.44%) scored 2 out of 5 or (2/5).

There is another group (14.37%) who scored nil. In contrast, there is a small percentage (6.32%) of learners who scored full marks, 5 out of 5.

The error type occurred is shown in the table ‘Error Types’ in Chapter 3.

It may be observed from the table mentioned above that only in 06.33 percent cases the replies were error free. In majority of the cases (55.17 %) the error was tense confusion. Confusion of tenses also occurs along with the other types of errors like avoidance, overproduction of a rule, wrong spellings, improper and inadequate vocabulary.

Similar tense confusion can also be observed when the sentences in the present
tense are told to convert to past tense. The score is shown in the table to Q. 3) of the learners’ schedule (worksheet). Refer to Chapter 3.

4.4.3 (Q.3) Change the verbs to the past tense.

The table reveals that only 30.46 percent could manage to score 4 marks and 16.67 percent could get full 5 marks. Majority of the students scored less than 4 marks. However, 12.07 percent of the learner respondents scored zero. The error type occurred in the replies are shown in the table ‘Error Types’ to the same question (See Chapter 3).

The table reveals that most of the errors identified fall into the category of tense. Most learner respondents seem to be thoroughly confused with the tense system\(^{13}\). There is a small group of 29 students who scored full marks in this particular exercise.

4.4.4 (Q.4) Use another modal verb and rewrite the sentences.

This exercise is also meant to check the proficiency of the learner respondents in tense use in an indirect way with the use of modal verbs. The scores are given in the table to Q4) in the learners schedule (worksheet). Refer to chapter 3.

In the above table a mixed score pattern is evident. Many (37 respondents) scored full marks and a large number scored below 4 out of 5. Remarkably, 18 respondents scored zero and 24 respondents scored 1 out of 5. But the error type shows the same pattern again. Most of the learners are confused with the tense system in English.

The ‘error type’ occurred is shown in the similar named table in Chapter 3.

Tense confusion still remains the major problem (17.82 % respondents). There are other error types detected like avoidance, confusion with modal verbs, spellings, improper vocabulary, but confusion with tenses occurs along with these problems also.

4.4.5 (Q.5) Write a composition on one of the following topics given:

This task has been designed to check the ability of the learners in writing a free composition. It is an unguided exercise. The learners can write about the topic as they wish and frame the sentences on their own. This exercise is planned to see the
proficiency level of the learners. This in turn will help in the assessment of the level of academic competence among the learner respondents.

The score table shows the scores secured by the learner respondents in the last task, that is, Q.5). Refer to Chapter 3. The above mentioned table brings out a reading which is surprising. In a few of the previous exercises some respondents scored full marks also. But in this task majority of the respondents scored below 3 (that is, 3 out of 5 marks), which constitutes 80.46% of the total respondents. Among these, the largest group, 38.51%, scored zero (0 out of 5 marks). The second group, 24.13%, scored 1 out of 5 marks and this is followed by the next group, 17.82%, scoring 2 out of 5 marks. There is a group of 16 respondents (9.20%) who scored 4 out of 5 and a very tiny group of 3 respondents (1.72%) managed to score full marks (5 out of 5).

All these variations in the score pattern and the most common linguistic category of error occurrence, tense, would be discussed.

As mentioned earlier, this worksheet was designed to test the learners’ proficiency level in the linguistic category of verbs which in turn will enable us to detect their error level in the English Tense System.

Analysis of the types of errors found in the worksheet or Learners’ Schedule

In the above discussion on the exercises given in the Learners’Schedule or Worksheet, the major areas of error have been identified. It is seen that the learner respondents have scored well when they are asked to identify the verbs in a sentence. The problem arises when they are asked to change the verbs into another tense (past tense) or when they are asked to rewrite the sentence using another appropriate modal verb or when they are asked to select the correct form of the given verbs. With the unguided composition exercise also the respondents showed problems in the use of tense. The scores and the percentage of the scores are also discussed in the above discussion. It has become very clear that the learner respondents are seriously entangled with the use of tenses. The confusion with the Tense System in English poses as a big hurdle in the entire English language learning process. The error types detected show that in all the exercises the majority of the learner respondents committed errors with the tenses. The other types of error detected were wrong spellings, improper vocabulary, confusion with the concept of modal verbs,
overproduction of a rule, and avoidance.

CLI may also manifest itself in avoidance behaviour where, for instance, a second language is perceived by the learner to be distant from the native language so that possible correspondences between the two systems envisaged by the language learner are simply not trusted. Avoidance behaviour was first documented experimentally by Schachter in 1974. Language Transfer is a subcategory of CLI.

Since the Tense System in the English language, according to this study, is the area of difficulty for the majority of the learners, it becomes necessary to describe the same. But prior to it a justification is offered regarding the selection of the linguistic category of verbs for this study.

4.5 Why was the Linguistic Category of Verbs selected for this study?

In a sentence the first integral part is the subject which is either a noun or a pronoun or a noun phrase. This subject is always in agreement with the verb. Hence, the second integral part of a sentence is the verb. Since the verb is an integral component of a sentence, learners need to have correct knowledge about verbs and its use in a sentence. This study tries to find out the error types and level in this category of verbs so that the errors in the tense system can be assessed. The next step in this study would be to find out the differences of the tense system in English and Assamese. It is believed that since the tense system varies in all languages, there would be manifestations of the cross-linguistic influences in the errors of the learner respondents.

4.6 Linguistic Category: Verbs in English

Grammar is a field of Linguistics which studies the rules that govern the use of any natural language. From the traditional point of view, grammar consisted of morphology and syntax. But, modern day linguistics includes areas such as phonetics, semantics and pragmatics along with morphology and syntax. In other words, grammar is a set of rules for a certain language. Hence, English language has its own distinctive grammar.

English Sentence structure

A simple sentence in English consists two parts: the subject and the predicate. The subject can either be a noun or a noun phrase or even a pronoun. The predicate on
the other hand consists of primarily the verb. In many cases the verb is followed by some constituent like an adverbial, a prepositional phrase or even a noun phrase. Basically there are five main elements or constituents of sentence structure:

- Subject
- Verb
- Complement
- Object
- Adverbial (though it is optional)

For a sentence to be grammatically correct, there need to be a minimum of two constituents: Subject + Verb. For example: Dogs (S) bark (V).

The maximum numbers of constituents or elements that can be present in a sentence are five: Subject + Verb + Object + Complement + Adverbial. For example: The Board(S) nominated (V) Sourav(O) the captain (C) on Tuesday(Adv).

The Linguistic Category of Verbs in English
In a sentence the first integral part is the subject which is either a noun or a pronoun or a noun phrase. This subject is always in agreement with the verb. Hence, the second integral part of a sentence is the verb.15

There are three kinds of verbs:

a) **Linking verbs**: In case of the linking verb, a complement or a subject complement is required to complete it. In other words, the linking verb joins together the subject and its complement. For example: Rita is a doctor.

b) **Intransitive verbs**: For an intransitive verb, an object or complement is not required to complete it. But an adverbial can be used optionally. For example: Raju argues (vehemently).

c) **Transitive verbs**: In case of the Transitive verb, an obligatory object is required. In most cases of its occurrence, the transitive verb occurs in a passive form. For example: Paulo Coelho has written several novels.

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.

In this study, to assess the proficiency of the learners at the production level, the
linguistic category of verbs has been selected.

In the worksheet given to the learners along with the questionnaire, five questions have been asked. Four questions deal with verbs directly. The fifth question is a test in the form of a free composition. Some topics have been selected and each respondent learner has to write on one topic. These exercises were then corrected and evaluated. From this evaluation the errors were picked and the areas where most errors occur were highlighted. The most common area of error making for the respondent learners is the area of tenses. Most of the respondents seem to be thoroughly confused with the tenses, especially when they were asked to change the tense in the sentence and frame a new one. (Give the percentage from the table.)

Before assessing the reason why the learner respondents displayed a poor level of proficiency, it becomes very necessary to learn about the tense system in the English language.

4.7 The Tense systems in English and Assamese:

4.7.1 The Tense System in the English Language

- The role of the tense system is to mark time.
- It is marked as an inflection on the verb and indicates the time reference point of the expression.
- In the English language, tense is marked in the first verb of the verb phrase.

On the basis of the inflection marked, verbs can be divided into two main types: Finite and infinite verbs.\(^{16}\)

- **Finite Verbs:** All verbs which are marked for tense by an inflection are referred to as finite verbs.
- **Infinite Verbs:** All verbs which are not marked for tense by an inflection are referred to as Non-finite or Infinite verbs.

Basically the English language has two tenses which inflect verbs. They are the Present tense and the Past tense. What is commonly referred to as the Future tense in English is something which is indicated by a modal auxiliary and not a verbal inflection.\(^{17}\)

**Present tense:** All verbs which are marked for tense by the inflection \(-s\) in a sentence, come under the present tense.

**Past Tense:** All verbs which are marked for tense by the inflection \(-ed\) in a
On the basis of the inflections used, verbs in English can be further divided into two types. They are Regular and Irregular verbs.

- **Regular Verbs**: Verbs which use the most productive inflection to mark time are referred to as Regular verbs. In other words, Verbs which use both the \(-s\) and \(-ed\) forms of inflections are known as Regular verbs. For example: *loves/loved, scores/scored, mixes/mixed*, etc.

- **Irregular Verbs**: Verbs which do not use any of the inflections, i.e. \(-s\) and \(-ed\), but instead employ a variety of other inflections are referred to as Irregular verbs. For example: \(-en\) as in *stolen, spoken*, etc. Sometimes no participle is used at all, as in *cuts/cut/cut*. There are seven sub-systems in the irregular verbs.

Tense is a temporal quality that denotes the time at which an action denoted by a verb takes place. One very significant aspect regarding tenses which researchers have found out is that tense varies from language to language. Tense cannot be translated from one language to another as there are a lot of differences. The number of tenses in a language also varies since verbs may indicate qualities like uncertainty, frequency, completion, duration, possibility, etc. (Biswas, Sarbojit 2009: 253).

After knowing the Tense System in English it is necessary to know the Verbs and the Tense System in Assamese and then find out the areas of difference.

### 4.7.2 The Tense System in Assamese

- The Tense System in Assamese is an integral part of the Linguistic category of Verbs; it is the same in English.

- In Assamese, the verbs are those words that undergo change when there is change in Person (‘Purush’), Tense (‘Kaal’), and Mood (‘Bhaav’).

- The verb in an Assamese sentence do not change with the change in Number (‘Bachan’).

- The role of the Tense System in Assamese is to mark time; this is also the role of the Tense System in English.

- The Tense in Assamese is marked as an inflection on the verb and indicates the time reference point of the expression; also similar to English.
The Assamese tense system is marked by inflections in the main morph called 'Dhatu'. The inflections or 'Pratyay' when added to the 'Dhatu' give indications about the various tenses. These are the inflections that indicate the definite tense and are known as 'Kriya-Bibhakti'. The main 'Dhatu' do not undergo any change but the inflections are too many. At this point the difference of the Assamese Tense System and the English Tense System begins.

'Kaal' or tense in Assamese can be divided into five types. They are:

i. 'Vartamaan Kaal' or the Present Tense,
ii. 'Bhoot Kaal' or the Past Tense,
iii. 'Bhavishyat Kaal' or the Future Tense,
iv. 'Puma-Vartamaan Kaal' or the Present-Perfect Tense, and
v. 'Puma-Bhoot Kaal' or the Past-Perfect Tense.

All these different tenses are demarcated by the use of the different 'Kriya-Bibhakti'.

The various inflections are further inflected since every division of the five tenses include different moods ('Bhava': 'Nirdeshak Bhava' and 'Anugya Bhava').

Along with the Moods the tenses-markers change with the use of different inflections that indicate Person or 'Purush'; first, second and third persons.

When the different inflections in the Assamese Tense System are considered, it becomes clearly evident that the numbers of inflections in the Assamese Tenses are much more than the inflections in the English Tense System.

4.7.3 Inflection

For the purpose of clarification it would be proper to define inflection. According to Saville-Troike, "inflection adds one or more units of meaning to the base form of a word, to give it more specific meaning" (Saville-Troike, 2010). For example, let us consider the English verb 'walk'. 'Walk' is the basic form and when we add another unit of meaning '-ed', the past tense of the basic form is expressed; like "I walked yesterday". When '-ing' is added to the basic form 'walk', the function of this unit of meaning is to express the progressive aspect; like "We were walking".

4.8 Tense Table in Assamese:

The following tables show the examples of the tense systems in English and Assamese.
All the tense tables given below in Assamese are taken from *Asomiya Byakaran* by Dr. Upendranath Bhattacharjya (1993).

### क्रिया बिभक्त

<table>
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<th>काल</th>
<th>प्रथम पुक्ष</th>
<th>द्वितीय पुक्ष</th>
<th>तृतीय पुक्ष</th>
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<td>आ</td>
<td>ए</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>भूत काल</td>
<td>लो</td>
<td>लि</td>
<td>ले</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>भविष्यৎ काल</td>
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<td>बि</td>
<td>ब</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>पूर्णबर्तमान काल</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>इছिलौ</td>
<td>इছिली</td>
<td>इছिला</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Word by word translation is done here from Assamese to English. In actual application, the change of context would include certain changes.

### (ক) অকাবাত ক থাতু

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুকুর</td>
<td>মাই দিতে</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তুমি (দিতে) দিয়ে</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মান)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুকুর</td>
<td>সিদুঃ (দিতে) দিয়ে</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(২) অনুজ্জ্ব ভাবঃ |
| ২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ) | তুমি দে | You give |
| (মান) | | |
| ৩য় পুকুর | সিদুঃ (দিতে) দিয়ে | Let him give |

ভূত কালঃ |
| ১ম পুকুর | মাই দিতে-তে | I gave |
| ২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ) | তুমি দিতে-তে | You gave |
| (মান) | | |
| ৩য় পুকুর | সিদুঃ দিতে | He gave |

ভবষাৎ কালঃ |
<p>| ১ম পুকুর | মাই দিতে-তে | I will give |
| ২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ) | তুমি দিতে-তে | You will give |
| (মান) | | |
| ৩য় পুকুর | সিদুঃ দিতে | He will give |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>বর্তমান-কালঃ</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1ম পুকুর</td>
<td>I have given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>You have given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3য় পুকুর</td>
<td>He has given</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>পূর্বতৃত্তের কালঃ</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1ম পুকুর</td>
<td>I had given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>You had given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3য় পুকুর</td>
<td>He had given</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ঘ) ইকাবান্ত জী ধাতু

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>বর্তমান-কালঃ</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(১) নির্দেশক ভাবঃ</td>
<td>I survive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1ম পুকুর</td>
<td>You survive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>He survive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3য় পুকুর</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| (২) অনুজ্ঞা ভাবঃ | |
| 2ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ) | You survive |
| 3য় পুকুর | He survive |

| তৃতীয় কালঃ | |
| 1ম পুকুর | I survived |
| 2ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ) | You survived |
| 3য় পুকুর | He survived |

(180)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ভবিষ্যৎ-কালঃ</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুকুর</td>
<td>মই জী-ম</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই জী-বি</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মানা)</td>
<td>তুমি জী-বা</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুকুর</td>
<td>সি জী-ব</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I will survive</strong></td>
<td><strong>You will survive</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>পূর্ণ বর্তমান কালঃ</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুকুর</td>
<td>মই (জী-ইছিলাই) জীছিলাই</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই (জী-ইছিলাই) জীছিলাই</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মানা)</td>
<td>তুমি (জী-ইছিলাই) জীছিলাই</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুকুর</td>
<td>সি (জী-ইছিলাই) জীছিলাই</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I am surviving</strong></td>
<td><strong>You are surviving</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>পূর্ণ ভূত কালঃ</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুকুর</td>
<td>মই (জী-ইছিলাও) জীছিলাও</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই (জী-ইছিলাও) জীছিলাও</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মানা)</td>
<td>তুমি (জী-ইছিলাও) জীছিলাও</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুকুর</td>
<td>সি (জী-ইছিলাও) জীছিলাও</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I had survived</strong></td>
<td><strong>You had survived</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(৩) গকাবন্ত বো ধাতু</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>বর্তমান-কালঃ</td>
<td>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(১) নির্দেশক ভাবঃ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুকুর</td>
<td>মই (বো-ও) বো</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই (বো-অ) বোয়</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মানা)</td>
<td>তুমি (বো-আ) বোরা</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুকুর</td>
<td>সি (বো-এ) বোরে</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I plant</strong></td>
<td><strong>You plant</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(২) অনুজ্ব ভাবঃ</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুকুর (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই বো</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মানা)</td>
<td>তুমি (বো-আ) বোরা</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুকুর</td>
<td>সি (বো-অক) বোরক</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>You plant</strong></td>
<td><strong>Let him plant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>পুর্ণ তূত কালঃ</td>
<td>মাই ক-ইছিলো</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুক্ত বিধ</td>
<td>মাই ক-ইছিলো</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুক্ত (তুচ্চ) বিধ</td>
<td>মাই ক-ইছিলো</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুক্ত বিধ</td>
<td>মাই ক-ইছিলো</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>বর্তমান-কালঃ</th>
<th>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(১) নির্দেশিকা ভাবঃ</td>
<td>I hold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I had held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You hold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(«H-^t) m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% («f^5f^)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IW Let him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ws^-f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>«*\</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^ (^-mO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I held</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$$ ^ C^)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^ («^-ft) #ft</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You held</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cm)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l&gt;ft («R-^f)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qft^f</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He held</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y* *l^r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(^r^c^J) qficSf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have held</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^Sf (^w)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>^ (q^ftft) «(^f^r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You had held</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OW ^ («H-W¥rf)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q^%tj</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ft (q^f^D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>qfi%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He had held</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(183)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>বর্তমান-কালঃ</td>
<td>ENGLISH TRANSLATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(1) নির্দেশক ভাবঃ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>মই (বা-ও)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুক্ত্ব (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই (যা-অ) যাব</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মান্য)</td>
<td>তুমিঃ (যা &gt;যো-আ) হোবা</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>সি যা-য়</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(২) অনুজ্জ্ব ভাবঃ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুক্ত্ব (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই যা</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মান্য)</td>
<td>তুমিঃ (যা &gt;যো-আ) হোবা</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>সি যা-ওক</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ভবিষ্যৎ কালঃ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>মই যা-ম</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুক্ত্ব (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই যা-বি</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মান্য)</td>
<td>তুমিঃ যা-বা</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>সি যাব</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ভূত কালঃ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>মই গ’-লো</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুক্ত্ব (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই গ’-লি</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মান্য)</td>
<td>তুমিঃ গ’-লা</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>সি গ’ল</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>পূর্ণ বর্তমান কালঃ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>মই (গ’-ইছেী) ঘোছেী</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুক্ত্ব (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই (গ’-ইছ) ঘোছ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মান্য)</td>
<td>তুমিঃ (গ’-ইছা) ঘোছাল</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>সি (গ’-ইছেী) ঘোছে</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>পূর্ণ ভূত কালঃ</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>১ম পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>মই (গ’-ইছিলো) ঘোছিলো</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>২ম পুক্ত্ব (তুচ্ছ)</td>
<td>তই (গ’-ইছিলি) ঘোছিলি</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(মান্য)</td>
<td>তুমিঃ (গ’-ইছিলা) ঘোছিল</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>৩য় পুক্ত্ব</td>
<td>সি (গ’-ইছিল) ঘোছিল</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(184)
4.9 The Tense System in English:

There are three basics Tenses in English:
- Present
- Past
- Future

Each Tense has the following forms:
- Progressive/Continuous (ongoing action)
- Perfect (Indicating completed action)
- Prefect Progressive/Perfect Continuous (ongoing action that will be completed after some definite time.)

The following table shows the use of the verb 'take' in its various forms of Tense

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Simple</th>
<th>Progressive</th>
<th>Perfect</th>
<th>Prefect Progressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Take/s</td>
<td>am/is/are taking</td>
<td>have/has taken</td>
<td>have/has been taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Took</td>
<td>was/were taking</td>
<td>had taken</td>
<td>had been taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Will/Shall take</td>
<td>will be taking</td>
<td>will have taken</td>
<td>will have been taking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.10 Analysis:

The above analysis evidently clarifies that the Inflections in English tenses vary from the Inflections in the Assamese language to a great extent. This difference can be marked as the reason for the errors in the tense system as found in the responses in the worksheet.

As has been mentioned earlier, tense is a temporal quality that denotes the time at which an action denoted by a verb takes place. One very significant aspect regarding tenses which researchers have found out is that tense varies from language to language. Tense cannot be translated from one language to another as there are a lot of differences.

This study comes to a conclusion that due to the differences in the two tense systems in the Assamese and the English languages, the learners whose first language is Assamese find it difficult to learn the English Tense System and, hence, are unable to acquire the target language English to a satisfactory level of proficiency.

It could be inferred from here that the difference in the two tense systems help in the negative transfer causing the cross-linguistic influences from the first lan-
language Assamese to surface when the target language English is learned.

But the questionnaire for the learners also reveals a positive influence of the first language in the learning of the second language English. The majority of the learners have expressed that they use the first language Assamese as a support base or a scaffolding device to conceptualize and learn the second language English.
Here the two Tense Systems in English and Assamese are compared and contrasted. This is done only for the purpose of finding the points of variation that will help in the study. This is not an elaborate or exhaustive contrastive analysis.

The study of inflections comes under the Morpheme Order Studies.