CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION : THE PROBLEM

1. Situations Calling for Second Language Study

There are situations in which one is circumstantially forced, required or persuaded to learn languages other than one's mother tongue (MT) or first language (L1). Most of the students and many non-students are called upon to learn additional languages particularly in these days of increased national and international interaction. People have to go to other countries or regions for several purposes such as business, studies, diplomatic assignments, pleasure trips, etc. They would be able to promote their interests at the new place only if they knew the language of the region visited or some language which is understood at a wider level. Besides, "there is scarcely a single modern nation in which there are not minority groups which are required to learn someone else's language as soon as they leave their birth place. As everyone knows, there are nations like Switzerland, Belgium, Finland, India and Yugoslavia where more than one language is officially recognised in the administration of their country."¹

2. Volume of Second Language Learning

This is why language teaching and language learning are fields of activity which are engaging great and growing human attention and energy. New researches are being carried out and incorporated in books on the teaching and learning of a Second/Foreign Language (L2). "Thousands upon thousands of people make a living by teaching languages, and millions of others spend scores of man-hours each, trying to learn. Every year large numbers of books and articles appear dealing with language instruction in all its aspects. Some publishers derive a considerable part of their income from the sale of language courses. ... There is every reason to think that all these activities will go on increasing in volume and intensity for a long time to come." 3

3. English as an L2

Whenever we talk of an L2 in India the first language that comes to our mind is English. This is because English as an L2 enjoys the highest place these days on the international plane as also in India. Besides, most of the books written on second language teaching, though equally applicable to any L2, draw illustrations and examples mostly from English. This is a clear proof to show what importance this language enjoys as an

2. The phrase 'Second Language' (abbreviated to L2) has been used in this thesis in the non-technical sense covering English as a second language as also as a foreign language or even as an alternative language. They are interchangeable terms here.

4. English in India

English was introduced in India about two centuries ago. Since then it has been playing a very important role in our educational system as well as in our national life. The aims with which it was introduced in India were undoubtedly shady rather than purely academic. It is a historical truth that the British Government adopted a language policy suited more to their political and commercial needs than to the actual requirements of our country. Lord Macaulay and his godfather, Charles Grant, who were the architects of this policy, had a great scorn for Indian languages, literature and knowledge. They aimed at producing a class of Indians who were Indians in blood and colour but English in manners, culture, taste and intellect. Since Macaulay's Minute of 1835 the study of English has dominated the educational scene in India, much to the chagrin of the national spirit and aspirations of the Indians.

Nevertheless, as it stands today, English has become almost indispensable in India for more reasons than one. While talking of the indispensability and of the literary and linguistic value of English in a number of Asian and African

5. See below footnote 11 (Ch.I)
6. Tulsi Ram, pp. 75-78.
countries including India, Dr. Paul Verghese says:

Most of the countries cannot give up the use of English for more than one reason. English education helped them get their ideas on freedom and self-government and enabled them to fight for the independence of their countries. In the multi-lingual contexts of these countries English became a unifying force and helped the freedom-fighters propagate the ideas of nationalism and self-rule. In these countries English still remains a cementing force. For instance, had it not been for the use of the English language, India, multi-lingual as she is, would have had greater constraints to reckon with to remain a united nation. 7

After the attainment of freedom, however, the national sentiment in India has been oscillating between the replacement and retention of English with a kind of love-hate relationship.

Pt. Nehru was in favour of retaining English in India until an alternative had been found and established. He regarded it as a cementing force in our country. English can be pushed out of India, it is felt even as late as the 90s, only at the risk of losing national unity under the prevailing circumstances.

In spite of the fact that English is only an adopted language in most of the Asian and African countries, it has developed deep cultural roots in most of them, India not excepted. English has also been a medium of creative writing in these countries and they have produced many world famous writers like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, V.S. Naipaul, Wole

Soyinka and others. The literature produced in these countries has come to be regarded as Commonwealth English literature which has its own identity and is distinct from the British and American literatures.

5. The Importance of Learning English

a) As an International Language

i- As a Language for Contact and Communication: Of all the languages spoken and written at present, English can be regarded as a world language for the reason that it is the world's most widely used language. "It is the most important language in the world today." It is a common means of communication between the people and the world population -- almost one-fourth can be reached through English. Randolph Quirk points out:

There are now something like 250 million people for whom English is the mother tongue or 'first language'. If we add to this the number of people who have a working knowledge of English as a second or foreign language (many Indians, Africans, Frenchmen, Russians and so on) we raise the total to about 350 million.

Besides, a very important reason for regarding English as a world language is that most of the world's latest scientific, technological, philosophical, economic and political knowledge is enshrined in English. In the words of Quirk "It is the most international of languages." 10

Whereas it is true that English is the native language of the English people, they are not the only native speakers of

10. Ibid., p.5.
this language. English is the MT also of the Americans, the Canadians and the Australians. Thus the native speakers of English are spread over three continents, viz., Europe, Australia and America. To quote Randolph Quirk again,

...most people who speak English are not English and were not born in England. Not only has the 'national' sense of English no official political meaning: the 'language' sense of 'English'... has no necessary link with the genetic sense either.11

English has established itself as the native and national language in Canada, Australia and the United States and, due to historical reasons, it has come to be widely used in African and Asian countries. In the erstwhile colonies of Great Britain, English has been taught and used as a medium of communication since the advent of the British rule. In India, for example, English is still being used as a medium of instruction in many colleges and universities, and is also the language of administration. "In addition, it is the language of commerce and the second language of many countries..."12

ii) For International Understanding and World Citizenship: Much of the cultural inter-communication among different nations of the world takes place through the medium of English. This language is the most potent repository of world culture. It helps people of diverse cultures and climes to come closer to each other for inter-cultural and international

11. Ibid., p.2.
understanding. It is solely this language which broadened the outlook of people by bringing them in contact with the masterminds of the world. The masterminds of India like Swami Vivekananda, Ravindernath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru and Dr. Radha Krishnan spread the message of India throughout the world through English. This language is very helpful for the integration of ideas on all aspects of human life -- social, cultural, educational, economic and political. Thus it is a language through which greater international understanding is being acquired which ultimately will lead to the acquisition of a sense of world citizenship.

b) As a Library Language.

The importance of English has been fully realized by the administrators and educationists in India. It is our major window on the world. The Report of the Education Commission (1966) emphatically asserted:

For a successful completion of the first degree course, a student should possess an adequate command of English, be able to express himself with reasonable ease and felicity, understand lectures in it and avail himself of its literature. Therefore, adequate emphasis will have to be laid on its study as a language right from the school stage. English should be the most useful 'library language' in higher education and our most significant window on the world. 13

Thus the commission recommended that a strong foundation in this language should be laid at the school stage. English is the language of intellectual communication in India and the best literature in almost all the branches of knowledge is to be

English literature is of great artistic, cultural and critical value. There are great works of poetry, drama, fiction and art in English language. The great literature of many other languages of the world is also available through English translations. We can reach Plato, Aristotle, Goethe, Tolstoy, Chekov and many other literary luminaries of the world — past and present — through the medium of English. We would really be losing access to the intellectual and cultural heritage of the world if we abandoned English altogether. So the first University Education Commission (1949) of free India stressed the importance of English thus:

English must, however, continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature — humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental urges, we should give up English we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge. Unable to have access to this knowledge our standards of scholarship would fast deteriorate and our participation in world movements of thought would become negligible.\(^\text{14}\)

So it is very essential for Indian students to acquire a sound knowledge of English language to serve as a key to the store-house of knowledge not yet available in the Indian languages. "English is the only means of preventing our isolation from the world and we will act unwisely if we allow ourselves to be enveloped in the folds of a dark curtain of ignorance."\(^\text{15}\)


15. Ibid.
c) **As a Link language in India**

In spite of more than 40 years of independence, English continues in India to serve as a link language. This is the language which is understood in all the states of the Union by the persons in administration and education. It has been declared as the *Associate Official Language of the Union* for an indefinite period by an Act of Parliament (1963). As such it dominates the administrative business at the centre as well as the states. Most of the administrative work is done in English throughout the country. Besides, English continues to be the language of the court -- not only of the Supreme Court but also of High Courts, District Courts and even the lower courts. Mostly cases are presented and judgements given in English. It is also the language used in autonomous bodies such as universities, various state boards, corporations, etc.

In view of this all, English is bound to be viewed as an important element in education. Hence all along during the past it has been given great importance in the scheme of education, and it continues to be taught in our schools and colleges.

6. **The Concern of this Study**

Over the last about 35 years of the writer's experience of learning and teaching English as an L2, a change in the method of teaching English has been observed. Earlier, grammar and translation used to form a significant part of the syllabus and examination pattern. But later on a shift of emphasis from grammar and translation to structures was gradually discernible.

till prescriptive grammar and translation were largely eased out of the scheme of teaching and examination.

In the beginning of this shift it was not realized that the net result of this change would be phenomenal but soon the wide effects of the change became apparent. The net amount of learning of the language in ordinary Haryana schools and colleges began to decline. Many concerned with the teaching of English began to realize the negatives of the effect. Teachers teaching English began to be heard and overheard saying that with the abolition of grammar and translation the students mostly failed to learn anything substantial. But then this assertion of theirs, even now often made, is opposed to the latest theory of learning an L2 which considers prescriptive grammar and the use of the MT an interference in the learning of an L2. It has been observed, however, that teachers of English mostly have been suppressing their real feelings except in a fit of truthfulness or until coaxed to be frank. But now a large number of them are on record (while responding to a questionnaire) to have said that in the average Indian conditions the use of the MT is not only desirable but also essential. Some of them have also gone to the extent of saying that the non-use of the MT in ordinary schools and colleges is only counterproductive. Many also regret the elimination of grammar and translation from the teaching schedule.

It is in view of this growing feeling that the present study has been undertaken to examine the question whether the role of the MT in learning English as an L2 is really and ultimately an interference in the usual Indian context too. If
it is, then, to suit our situation, is there a better alternative than the use of, or reference to the MT? And, if there is none, can we, while making use of the MT in the learning of English as an L2, convert this interference into relevance? And if we can, what is the degree of relevance and in what areas and aspects of learning? But before we go ahead to consider these questions certain other points essentially related to English as an L2 need to be attended to.

7. The Teaching of English in India During the Past

For long during the last century and at least the first two quarters of the current century English kept on being taught in ordinary schools of India essentially through the MT of the learner, the method being what is generally known as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). The GTM probably started with the very inception of the scheme of teaching English in India from the beginning of the 19th century. English was recommended by the British experts to be studied here as a "classical language, the language of a few people for limited purposes in education." The rules of English grammar and usage were explained through the MT and the learners were given for practice a set of sentences of a particular pattern in the vernacular language to be translated into English and vice versa. The books on grammar and translation were prepared with reference to the semantic and syntactic structures of the two languages, English and the MT of the learner. Each and every important structure of English language was picked up with a corresponding vernacular version of the structure and content thereof. Even in the case of idioms and proverbs, the striking

17. Elphinstone quoted, Tulsi Ram, p.67.
parallels in the two languages were juxtaposed. The exceptions to the correspondences were taken care of separately. Books on grammar, translation and idioms used to be the prize possessions of both the beginners and the advanced students of English until about 1947, and in some states until recently.

While talking of the different methods employed for the teaching of English as an L2, Dr. C.P. Verghese speaks of the GTM thus:

The earliest method is the one generally known as the Grammar Translation Method. This is actually the same as the method used for teaching classical languages like Latin and Greek, and is also called the 'classical method'. The method insisted on the memorisation of grammatical rules and translation of related texts, and paid little attention to speaking and reading as skills to be developed. The method pre-supposes that the process of translation will enable the student to master the syntax, phraseology, idioms, etc., of the second language.18

Robert Lado says:

At the end of the nineteenth century, language learning had become grammar recitation and dictionary thumbing. The students defined the parts of speech; memorized conjugations, declensions and grammar rules; and translated selections, using a bilingual dictionary or glossary.19

Though Lado talks here of the GTM rather disparagingly, we do get an idea of how this method was being practised in Europe in learning an L2. The same was true of India in relation to learning English (or for that matter, any of the classical languages like Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian). However, in India the GTM continued being practised largely even beyond the first half of the 20th century and the results of new research and directions in language teaching came to be reflected in University/Board courses only very late. This fact is evidenced by a comparative study of the courses prescribed around the beginning of the second half (only roughly speaking) of the current century with those at present. We may, for example, refer to the Punjab University syllabus prescribed for Matriculation Examination, 1959 and compare it with the syllabus for the same class for the year 1991 prescribed by Haryana Board of School Education. The grammar and translation component in the former case is much too weighty as compared to the latter case.

8. The Big Change in the Method of Teaching

Evidently for the last few decades there has been a significant shift in the approach of experts with regard to the teaching and learning of English as an L2 in Indian schools and colleges. This change can be described as a change in favour of what is pedagogically called the Direct Method (DM) of teaching an L2.
In any case, with the introduction of the DM, there is almost no place or very little place for translation in the curricula of English as being practised in schools and colleges of India. There was a time when passages for translation from a vernacular language into English and vice versa were set for examinations even at as high a level as M.A. (English). But at the moment this practice has been discontinued even for elementary examinations. The Central Board of School Education, New Delhi, prepares syllabi for classes from I to XII (which are largely followed by state Boards of School Education) and gives very little place to translation irrespective of the kind of students such syllabi are prescribed for. As a matter of fact teachers are expected to make no use of the MT for the teaching of English. They are supposed to be teaching through DM and apply the structural approach of teaching English. This is evidenced by the re-orientation courses being given to the in-service teachers and the teaching method advocated in training courses for the would-be teachers of English.

Conferences on the teaching of English make strong recommendations for the use of the DM and complete elimination of the MT from the teaching of English as L2. For example, the North

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20. Refer to M.A. (English) syllabus of the Punjab University, Chandigarh, for the year 1963-64 and compare it with that of Haryana Board of School Education, Class X Examination, 1991.
The committee is unanimous in recommending the direct method liberally construed, in the teaching of literature and of language through literature; unanimous, too, in its condemnation of the use of translation as major teaching or testing device ... If a student is to react psychologically to a foreign language stimulus, that is, to think in that language, he should not be handicapped by the bad habit of translation and re-translation. The natural tendency to translate is strong and should be constantly resisted. One device that has been proved effective is the introduction of a unilingual dictionary at an appropriate time during these years.21

9. The Underlying Principle Governing the Change

What, after all, is the idea behind prohibiting the use of the MT? What has led the experts to decide against the use of MT, which was the principal medium of/aid to teaching and learning English until about a couple of decades ago? There has been a lot of talk these days of the interference of the MT during the process of learning an L2. Expert after expert has opined that the role of the MT in the learning and teaching of an L2 has been only negative. In most damning terms D.A. Wilkins has the following to say on the use of the learner's MT:

In deciding how far we are justified in using the learner's mother tongue, we must remember that the time spent using it (the mother tongue) is time not spent...
using the foreign language, and when the learner is so short of contact time anyway we should consider very carefully whether any intended use is really justified ... The greater the use of the mother-tongue the less will be the learner's practical command of the foreign language.\textsuperscript{22}

Here the interference implied means not an active distortion of the target language (TL) structures but a deprivation of the TL on the time that could be or ought to be available for the teaching of it. Elsewhere Wilkins says:

If, therefore, we look at the speech and writing of the foreign language learner, there is little reason to doubt that we will find many mistakes which can be traced back to the mother tongue. The comedian probably gets most, though not all, of his effects by imitating the foreigner's pronunciation, but in fact evidence of the mother-tongue is found on a far wider scale than this, even if it is not always recognised. It might be useful to begin this discussion by demonstrating the extent to which a learner uses features of his native language in his attempts to speak and write in the foreign language.\textsuperscript{23}

Here interference means a process of active distortion of the pronunciation and idiom of the TL through an unconscious import of the MT sounds, structures and idioms. Also Wilkins has made

\textsuperscript{22} Second Language Learning and Teaching (London: Edward Arnold, 1974), p. 83.

an appreciable point here because he has pointed to the fact that the MT interference is a natural phenomenon and is of varied types: phonological, morphological, cultural, semantic, syntactic and grammatical. A lot of research has been carried out and is still going on to determine the extent of this interference, and ways and means to check it. The courses and syllabi are being restructured. The text books to be used in the class are being reshaped.

10. Contrastive Analysis

At the same time there is another result of these findings which has a direct bearing on the methods of teaching. A whole new field of interest in linguistics has grown. This field usually called 'Contrastive Analysis' has become a major pre-occupation with scholars of Applied Linguistics. For many

24. W.F. MacKey in an exhaustive bibliography on the single item of 'Language Teaching' enlists some 210 books dealing mostly with the teaching of English as an L2. This speaks volumes of the work being done in the direction. Most of these books such as Robert Lado's Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach, M. Finocchiaro's English as a Second Language: From Theory to Practice do not advocate the use of MT for teaching an L2.

25. Some of the important books and articles carrying out error analysis/contrastive analysis are:

a) U. Weinreich, Language in Contact (The Hague, Mouton, 1953): This book is a classical study of bilingualism. It laid the ground for the interest of applied linguistics in MT interference.

b) J. Richards, ed., Error Analysis (London: Longman, 1974). It is a collection of papers including some of the most influential articles.

people applied linguistics is contrastive analysis. Large scale projects have been set up for the comparative study of languages with the justification that the results will prove significant and valuable for language teaching.  

In the same vein Henry W. Kirkwood says: "On a phonological, syntactical and semantic level, interference from the mother tongue may be taking place. A contrastive analysis will show up the points of difference and conflict, and it is to these points that language teaching should pay particular attention."  

Kirkwood even supports translation method (and that too at an advanced stage of learning) though only with a view to focus the learner's attention on the points of difference between his L1 and TL. He says:

At a more advanced level of language learning, contrastive analysis through translation--translation as a means and not as an end in itself, and in small, but intensive doses--is a way of bringing to the student's attention points of difference and conflict on a semantic and syntactic level, of coming to grips with these differences and conflicts and to some extent of resolving them. The material selected for translation should be neutral prose rather than passages in a unique and idiosyncratic language bristling with stylistic problems.  

28. Ibid., p. 178.
Thus we see that the linguists are getting interested in the contrastive analysis of first languages playing a role in the teaching of an L2. It marks a realization on their part of the role MT can play in the scheme of teaching an L2. In fact the significance of contrastive analysis as stated initially by Robert Lado and reinforced by others, viz., S.P. Corder, J.E. Alatis, G.Nickel and J.Richards subsequently is great. However, there has so far not been any considerable exploitation of the likely and positive role of MT (here Hindi) in teaching an L2 (here English). Consequently the DM in the teaching of English continues to be patronised in an unchallenged manner and brooks (at least theoretically) no intervention whatsoever from the MT. But in this connection it has to be noted that the process of learning cannot be psychologically isolated, nor can the process be studied or viewed as if in laboratory conditions. It has to be studied as something whole and in the total context of the learning and teaching situations. In India it has to be viewed in the general Indian context.

29. a) Robert Lado, Linguistics Across Cultures (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957). This is the first formulation of the use of contrastive analysis in language teaching with very good examples.

b) S.P. Corder, "Error Analysis, Interlanguage and Second Language Acquisition" Language Teaching and Linguistics Abstracts 8, No. 4 (1975). This article surveys the work carried out in the research into second language acquisition.


d) J.Richards: See above footnote 25(b).

e) G.Nickel: See above footnote 25(c).
11. Counterproductiveness of DM

Before taking up for discussion the usual Indian context in relation to the teaching of English it is only in the fitness of things to point out that the introduction of DM in the average Indian schools without having congenial conditions in them has been only counterproductive. The standards have fallen. The students in schools are not able to acquire even the little efficiency they were able to acquire earlier with the help of GTM. A survey was conducted to study the standard of competence in the use of English and to find out what is responsible for the fall of the standard of English in Indian schools and colleges. Twelve school and college teachers participated. Nine out of 12 held the DM and the elimination of GTM as directly responsible for the decline. They also opined largely that it was impossible to teach most of the aspects of English to the students without taking recourse to MT.

Besides, in academic issues, and for that matter any issue, we cannot afford to follow rigidly and indiscriminately any guideline given by new researches. Every such direction has to be tested by making its application in the practical field. Similarly in the field of teaching an L2 we have to adopt that method which works, which is effectively result-oriented. "Language Teaching is a pragmatic business and we should judge it accordingly. What works is good; what does not work is bad."

30. Wilkins, Second Language Learning and Teaching, p. IX.
In any case keeping in view the prevailing situation and the observed counterproductiveness of DM it is very essential to review its effectiveness, and then take measures either to create favourable conditions for its practice or to abandon it in favour of the GTM or to compromise practically somewhere half way. A fair view on this issue can be formed only after all aspects of the matter have been taken into consideration. As pointed out earlier even the linguists are not for a complete elimination of MT in learning an L2. Lado too relents and says that "The use of full sentences in the first language to give the meaning of the dialogues for memorization, however, is a common device which many linguists accept and use." 31 C.J.Dodson followed with his significant work Language Teaching and the Bilingual Method. 32 The views of Lado and Dodson justify an exploration of the relevance, if any, of MT in L2 learning and teaching.

31. Language Teaching, p. 54.