CHAPTER IX

Conclusion

This study took off from an ESL scene that was unsatisfactory and disappointing in many ways -- not because of a dearth of approaches, methods and techniques, but because of the confusion and chaos created by a profusion of these, and the prolific output in the name of methods and techniques from all quarters, often without any theoretical bases or a clearly visualized approach; the scene was far from satisfactory this way. A practising teacher got more confused than guided by the prescriptions for the ESL classroom that were doled out to him by printers and publishers all over the world -- most of them without any practical relevance for the ESL classrooms which were really in existence in developing countries like India.

Second Language (SL) teaching is an art in which intuition should play a more decisive role than theories which profess to be 'scientific'. The inspired teacher in the SL classroom, more often than not, knows intuitively what should work and produce results in the classroom. The task before the ESL theoretician is perhaps to inspire the ESL teacher with a proper understanding of the complex processes of language acquisition and use in general, and of the strands of the English culture which have got intricately woven into the fabric of the English language in use in particular. Inspired this way, the teacher should know intuitively for himself, the right procedures to follow in the
ESL classroom, without the benefit of the knowledge of any theory as such. SL teaching 'theories' can rightly stem only from a proper understanding of the processes of language acquisition and use. Our approaches, methods and techniques should flow from such an understanding. Too often in the past have SL teaching theories been proposed and methods and techniques been prescribed without taking into account the nature of the process(es) being targeted. As has been argued in Chapters III and IV of this study, the nature of the process of language acquisition/use is such that it cannot and will not unfold without purposeful contact with and imitation of authentic models and without repetitive practice in such imitation.

In the past we have had ample experience with the use of the grammar-translation method, the natural/direct method, the structural approach, the notional/situational approach and the communicative/communicational method, to name just a few of the major landmarks in the history of SL teaching. This study would like to state that our past experience with SL teaching unmistakably points to the fact that there has never been an approach, method or technique that has worked equally well in all types of situations. Each approach/method/technique focusses on a certain type of situation comprising a certain type of environment, teacher and learners. What works with one type need not and may not work with another. Each situation demands a
unique kind of treatment -- a unique approach and a unique set of
tools and techniques; it would be safest not to make any
blanket prescriptions and to mislead unsuspecting practitioners
in the classrooms. A proper understanding of the processes of
language acquisition and use should enable them to handle
satisfactorily the actual situation in which they are placed.
This is the conviction that has been upheld by this study.

This study endorses the view that any SL teaching method or
technique would work, provided that it ensures sufficient
meaningful repetitions of a large enough number of basic word­
strings in the language, and that the grammar-translation
method, the direct method, the structural approach, the
notional/situational approach and the communicative/communicatio­
nal methodology have all worked and produced results under
conditions suited to them, and failed elsewhere. This study is
not for or against any particular approach, method or technique,
but it is against blanket prescriptions, which it believes to
have been the worst malady in the field of SL teaching.

Therefore, it was by choice that this study left out
discussions of the approaches/methods/techniques proposed so far
in the field; these were not unintentional omissions, but
deliberate avoidances, because of two reasons: (1) Every research
programme in the field of SL teaching in the past has focussed on
these, and these have been discussed threadbare by too many
researchers already; and (2) Such discussions, more often than not, have proved unproductive. At the end of such discussions, one is often left with no conclusive findings and answers to one's queries. Inconclusive findings provide no answers, and lead nowhere. Too often in the past have we had the experience of coming to dead ends with no future directions, in the field of SL teaching.

Therefore, this study, by deliberate choice, decided to turn to the fundamentals once again, hoping that some of the crucial 'answers' might be sought out that way, and this hope has certainly not been belied. It has been a fruitful exercise to identify the Whorfian hypothesis and the Vygotskyan theory as the two most major landmarks as far as theories of language and language acquisition were concerned. It was a deliberate choice to focus on these and these alone, for the fundamentals in language pedagogy. What determined this choice was the fact that, of all the known theories, these appeared to lie closest to the truth and to the heart of the matter. Taking off from the theoretical bases provided by these, this study has been able to make a set of proposals for simple acquisition activities (based mainly on meaningful repetitions) in the ESL classroom, with the conviction that these ought to work, for no reason other than the fact that their workability has to be granted on a priori grounds. The researcher has no claims to present, except that
intuitively he feels convinced about their workability and effectiveness.

All the same, it is not being denied that a model reading course as such (and not just a prototype) should have been produced, and also tried out, on an actual set of Intermediate level learners, in order to show results. However, the time available to the researcher having been limited, it would have been unrealistic to attempt a programme as elaborate as that. The researcher feels that this study should come to its fitting end with the recommendation that a model reading course be prepared on the lines worked out and demonstrated in the prototype presented in the study, and also tried out in a longitudinal programme on a group of Intermediate level learners, in order to provide the empirical evidences required for the validation of the proposals made in this study.

Certain excerpts from the reading course currently in use at the Intermediate level in the University of Kerala are given below, in support of some of the claims made by this study.

I. A reproduction of the 'contents' page -- in order to show the wide variety of the chosen reading passages, with no scope for the much needed repetitions, and also the culturally alien themes they deal with -- an anthology perhaps for interesting and enjoyable reading, but not for an ESL teaching course.
researchers already; and (2) Such discussions, more often than not, have proved unproductive. At the end of such discussions, one is often left with no conclusive findings and answers to one's queries. Inconclusive findings provide no answers, and lead nowhere. Too often in the past have we had the experience of coming to dead ends with no future directions, in the field of SL teaching.

Therefore, this study, by deliberate choice, decided to turn to the fundamentals once again, hoping that some of the crucial 'answers' might be sought out that way, and this hope has certainly not been belied. It has been a fruitful exercise to identify the Whorfian hypothesis and the Vygotskian theory as the two most major landmarks as far as theories of language and language acquisition were concerned. It was a deliberate choice to focus on these and these alone, for the fundamentals in language pedagogy. What determined this choice was the fact that, of all the known theories, these appeared to lie closest to the truth and to the heart of the matter. Taking off from the theoretical bases provided by these, this study has been able to make a set of proposals for simple acquisition activities (based mainly on meaningful repetitions) in the ESL classroom, with the conviction that these ought to work, for no reason other than the fact that their workability has to be granted on a priori grounds. The researcher has no claims to present, except that
intuitively he feels convinced about their workability and effectiveness.

All the same, it is not being denied that a model reading course as such (and not just a prototype) should have been produced, and also tried out, on an actual set of Intermediate level learners, in order to show results. However, the time available to the researcher having been limited, it would have been unrealistic to attempt a programme as elaborate as that. The researcher feels that this study should come to its fitting end with the recommendation that a model reading course be prepared on the lines worked out and demonstrated in the prototype presented in the study, and also tried out in a longitudinal programme on a group of Intermediate level learners, in order to provide the empirical evidences required for the validation of the proposals made in this study.

Certain excerpts from the reading course currently in use at the Intermediate level in the University of Kerala are given below, in support of some of the claims made by this study.

I. A reproduction of the 'contents' page -- in order to show the wide variety of the chosen reading passages, with no scope for the much needed repetitions, and also the culturally alien themes they deal with--an anthology perhaps for interesting and enjoyable reading, but not for an ESL teaching course.
II. Extracts from two of the reading passages -- in order to show the stylistic unsuitability of the language used in them (the word-strings appearing in them being far from basic and not of the general service type.)

III. Extracts from questions provided at the end of three passages -- in order to show that they may stimulate some intellectual activity among the learners but not promote any language acquisition. Most course-books nowadays are full of such questions--for intelligent answering, but not for picking up basic word-strings of the language.

I. Contents

1. The Kite Maker
   Success is Counted Sweetest
   Ruskin Bond
   Emily Dickinson

2. Paul Julius Reuter
   Harry McNicol

3. The Appointed Day
   The Little Black Boy
   Jawaharlal Nehru
   William Blake
   Clarence Day

4. Father has a Bad Night
   Christian Barnard
   Alfred Tennyson

5. One Life
   The Eagle
   Khushwant Singh
   C.E.M. Joad

6. The Portrait of a Lady
   I am the People: the Mob
   Carl Sandburg
II.

1. Lesson 9

Guidelines for Good Talk

George McGhee

It's the quality, not the quantity, that counts.

What has happened to the art of conversation? By conversation I do not mean merely word exchanges between individuals. I am thinking, rather, of one of the highest manifestations of human intelligence--the ability to transform abstractions into language; the ability to convey images from one mind to another; the ability to build a mutual edifice of ideas; in short, the ability to engage in a civilizing experience.

But where does one find good conversation these days? Certainly not in the presence of the television set. No matter
how rewarding 'bridge talk' may be, it is not conversation. Neither is chatter.

What makes good conversation? In the first place, it is essentially a mutual search for the essence of things. It is a zestful transaction, not a briefing or a lecture. Russian poet Alexander Pushkin correctly identified the willingness to listen as one of the vital ingredients of any exchange. When two people are talking at the same time, it is not conversation—it's collision.

Nothing is more destructive of good talk than for one participant to hold the ball too long, like an over-zealous football dribbler playing to the crowd. Pity the husband or wife with a garrulous mate who insists on talking long past the point where he or she has anything to say.

To be meaningful, a conversation should head in a general direction. It need not be artfully plotted, but it should be gracefully kept on course guided by unforeseen ideas.
At first when I tried what was then the new sport I became almost discouraged; the cameras simply would not do the work. After endless trouble in stalking some animal, the camera would, often as not, go wrong just at the critical moment. What would I not have given to have had almost any of the handy, light, modern cameras that people accept today as a matter of course, that are so easy to manipulate and so certain in their action that even a child can use them! In what people foolishly call 'those good old days' of long ago things were hard, and we had to work for our successes. In vain did I go to the various makers of cameras and lenses and try to induce them to make outfits suitable for the work I wanted to do. They said it would not pay them to make special cameras, as I was almost the only person who would use them.

III. 1. Questions based on:

Lesson 4

Father has a Bad Night

Clarence Day

a. Do you think Mrs Wainwright's boy had had a serious accident? Give a reason for your answer. (One or two sentences)
b. What is peculiar about Father's reaction at seeing the boy?

c. Mrs Wainwright thought that Mr Day had been very sympathetic. Would you agree with her?

d. What was the new horror that Father couldn't get away from?

e. Mother said that Father was 'heartless'. Would you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

f. Why do you think Mother told him not to go and see his son? (One sentence)

g. Do you think the son was in great pain? Give a reason for your answer.

2. Questions based on:

Lesson 6

The Portrait of a Lady

Khushwant Singh

a. Grandmother 'had always been short and fat and slightly bent.' Is this true, in the light of what is said in the first paragraph? What information given in the first paragraph would you cite in support of your answer?

b. Grandmother is portrayed as a very religious woman. What details in the story create that impression?

c. Grandmother is portrayed as a kind woman. What details in the story give you that impression?

d. 'That was a turning-point in our friendship'. What happened to the friendship?

e. In what respects does the author say that city school education was different from village school education?

f. What could have been the cause of Grandmother's falling ill?

g. How did the sparrows show (on the last day) that they had not come for the bread?
3. Questions based on:

Lesson 12

Taming the Atom

a. What is fission—that is, what happens to the atom in fission? What does fission produce that is very important for man?

b. What must be done to make a uranium atom split?

c. What does a splitting uranium atom do that causes neighbouring uranium atoms to split too?

d. When a few splitting atoms in a lump of uranium cause more atoms to split and they in turn split other atoms, what is the process called? If this process is not checked, what happens as a result?

e. What kind of change (at the level of the atom) causes the heat given out in burning? What does not change? What is the cause of the energy produced in an atomic explosion?

This study believes that reading courses currently in use at the Intermediate level, of which the one referred to above is a typical example, are outcomes of attempts made for producing courses, without the necessary understanding of the nature of the targeted learning process(es). This study has mainly been a fight against this dangerous practice, and a modest effort to show the type of understanding necessary, and also to argue a case for developing courses that bear the stamp of such understanding in existence and in active operation in the process of course production. In short, the study set off with the conviction that it was time to go back to the fundamentals once again, and to produce ESL teaching courses faithfully based on them.