Introduction

1. Background Information

Society is operating through languages. In a multicultural society and global marketplace, language as a means of communication makes the people active. Dissimination of information, knowledge acquisition, scientific discoveries and technical advancement, etc., too are happening through language. It represents the conceptions of human beings; enhances the degree of bilingualism and metalingualism; helps to develop independence and autonomy; encourages to cooperate with each other; develops communicative skills, and accent naturalisation; also, it is a means of thinking, and representing the world to oneself. Thus, facilitates around growth of people who constitute the society. Therefore, teaching and learning a language systematically is very important.

Globalization and the spread of market relations in every sphere of society have important implications for language education as it helps to gain knowledge, information and interpret things correctly. If we look at social history, it would be seen that teaching of language and literature has always been playing a prominent role in the Indian education system.

National Policy of Education 1986 (3.7) states “minimum levels of learning is laid down for each stage of education. Steps will also be taken to foster among students an understanding of diverse culture and social systems of the people living in different parts of the country”. Languages are ‘central to education’. In our pluralistic society, use and development of languages in the education context is riddled with complexities.
Policy statement and curriculum documents states about the Implementation of the three-language formula, which was so far designated as a strategy (NPE, 1968).

Though the issues mentioned above are stated in the policy, there is lot of dilutions in practice.

A review of the NPE, 1986 states that minimum levels of learning are laid down for each stage of education. But practically it has not happened. There is no clarity across levels in terms of inputs and outputs.

The 3 language formula exists only in our policy statements but not in actual practice because of various reasons. Many a time, in the name of language only literature is taught (may be, because it gives a maximum scope for language operation).

The non-availability of clearly specified content inputs (in quantifiable/measurable terms), gives a scope for different interpretations on the quantum of language being learnt. It would naturally vary from person to person, thus affecting the coordination among the teachers, learners, and evaluators. In order to overcome this, the need for specification of content inputs (which are expected to be taught, learnt and evaluated) in a quantifiable manner, becomes very much essential.

As part of fulfilling this need, this study of Assessment in Language learning with reference to Morphological aspects (a pragmatic approach) was initiated.

2. Issues and Scope of Study

All these require the proper understanding of the concept of a language, both as a subject of study and as a medium of instruction. The concern here is more on subject of study. Accordingly, an attempt is made to understand the concept of language in terms of its structure and nature, and also its operations in different contexts.
Society consists of different social groups of people. The language needs of one group may not be the same as that of the other. Hence, it becomes necessary to pool out all of these needs together for the purpose of teaching and learning. Further, society is not static, but dynamic because of the people’s mobility. When society is dynamic, language also becomes dynamic with new additions and deletions at all the levels. All these have implications on the methods and materials used for teaching, learning, and evaluation. Therefore, necessity arises to evolve a mechanism for updating the methods and materials to meet the above requirements.

The crux of the above issues is more at the level of evaluation; seeks answer to question as what to evaluate? The prerequisite of evaluation (a part of which is assessment) demands ensuring the object to be taken up for assessment is definable/evaluable, and subsequently quantifiable. Quantification requires specification of constituent elements as well as dimensions associated with them. This would also facilitate the process of 'measurement' (which plays a predominant role in the area of evaluation). In a classroom context, teachers (who happen to be assessors themselves) use different tools and methodologies. It is often left unclarified as how accurately measurement of language is done; also, as how to build up and make use of the tools and methodologies. Hence, the focus of this study is directed towards working out the details of language components and also the properties associated with them in such a way that their quantification becomes easier, and thereby ensuring the assessment more relevant and meaningful in the context of teaching and learning. Since the enormity of work to cover the whole area of language is very high, it has been decided to restrict the coverage only to the level of morphology and more specifically to the aspects of verb morphology viz., verb, adverb, and particles & clitics.
Accordingly, the scope of this study is restricted to assessment of the language being learnt at the level of verb morphology with examples drawn from Tamil.

3. Objectives of the Study
The focus is therefore to highlight the practical problems encountered by learners of Tamil as L₂ (in the SRLC, PILC, IITS Chennai, University of Malay) while learning the aspects of verb morphology, and subsequently the details of dimensional factors that are causing such problems and their broad categories. These details are expected to pave a way for obtaining quantitative as well as qualitative measures, towards making value judgment. Keeping these basic premises in mind, the objectives for this study have been formulated as shown below:

An attempt would be made to
1. define and demarcate the components that constitute the aspects of verb morphology viz., verb, adverb, and particles & clitics.
2. identify the types and categories of problems that are encountered while learning these aspects in Tamil language.
3. identify and define the dimensional factors, that are associated with the above mentioned aspects and to classify them under certain broad categories, for evolving a mechanism in terms of a list of leaning points, to overcome the problems being encountered, apart from other issues.
4. outline the details of assessment tools, and formulate a set of questionnaires – one each for collecting written and oral responses, and administering them on the learners of Tamil as L₂ who form the experimental group.
5. suggest the details worked out as a mechanism for quantifying the language being learnt with reference to verb, adverb, and particles &
clitics, and to establish their viability for enhancing the relevance and meaningfulness of the process of teaching, learning, and evaluation.

4. Basic Resources

The study was initiated on the basis of the following materials produced (in bilingual forms) by the Centre for Testing and Evaluation of CIIL: (1) General Frame of Reference (GFR) for language, literature, and personality (2) Morphological part of assessing mastery of language, the relevant portion of (3) Assessing personality through language, (4) works on the aspects of morphology, their dimensions, operating contexts and other related areas by various grammarians and scholars in Tamil, and (5) the course readers being followed in the basic, intermediate and advanced levels of the 10 month training course in Tamil at the SRLC.

5. Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to only the L₂ context of learning a language (where the structure and nature get the primary focus). The experimental group is limited to Non-Tamils learning Tamil as second language (L₂). With in the morphological level of language, the scope of this study is further limited to the aspects of only verb morphology viz., verb, adverb, and particles & clitics. Among these 3 entities, verb and adverb have been dealt with as independent entities. However, particles (free forms) & clitics (bound forms) though could occur with nouns and verb, only their occurrence with verbs alone has been considered for this study.

6. Consultative Sources

The libraries of National Testing Service-India (NTS-I), Southern Regional Language Centre (SRLC), Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), and also the Central Hindi Institute (CHI) Mysore were the main
consultative sources for this study. In addition to the above, references were also drawn from various theoretical works on linguistics, pedagogy, grammars, educational measurement, and evaluation from different sources. Further, the resources available in the Departments of Linguistics in the University of Mysore, Madurai Kamaraj University, Tamil University, Dravidian University, Annamalai University, PILC Pondicherry, IITS Chennai, etc., were also utilised to some extent.

7. Chapterization

The outcome of this research study is presented in 5 chapters apart from Introduction, Conclusion, Bibliographical references and 10 Appendices.

Introductory part of this work provides the background information, issues and scope of this study, objectives, basic references, limitations, consultative sources, and chapterization.

Chapter 1 provides various views on the aspects of verb morphology viz., verb, adverb, and particles & clitics, in historical perspectives. This includes the views of various grammarians and authors worked on Tamil especially on concepts of verb, adverb, and particles & clitics, followed by the inferences, and concluding remark of the researcher.

Chapter 2 provides the details of problems and methods adopted. The problems encountered by the learners of Tamil as L2 while learning the aspects of verb morphology viz., verb, adverb and particles & clitics have been collected, analysed, and categorized based on their causal factors. Specific methods adopted at various stages of this work have been highlighted.

Chapter 3 is devoted to highlight the dimensions of language and learning points. 5 dimensions viz., form, function, structure, boundary and meaning have been identified and listed, along with their definitions in general and specific to language, followed by examples. Subsequently, the problem
contributing factors (which were later converted as learning points) have also been identified and listed along with examples under each of the 5 dimensions and also with reference to verb, adverb, and particles & clitics.

Chapter 4 deals with assessment and quantification. The concept of assessment is discussed in the context of determining the quantum of language being learnt. It is followed by the formulation and preparation of a set of questionnaires - one each for getting written and oral responses. The details of target groups, field tryouts, data collection, etc., are also provided. Besides them, the issues involved in assessing the language being learnt with reference to the aspects of verb morphology and other related issues, are incorporated.

Chapter 5 is devoted for analysis of the data collected under different headings. The focus of the analysis is made to determine the viability of learning points proposed, by adopting a four point criteria viz., self introspection, quality of tools used, the impact caused on the learners (by these learning points), and the opinions of teachers & researchers of L2.

The concluding part provides the outcome of this study in nutshell, under 9 headings along with bibliographic references, and appendices which include 10 items with their clarificatory details.