Introduction

This dissertation is an attempt at investigating into the dynamics of classroom interaction, in the context of English language learning process as is found in the English classrooms in Kerala, especially in the city of Thiruvananthapuram. The study was carried out in two schools, a government-aided school and a government school, representative of the English learning/teaching situation faced by the majority of learners at the higher secondary level in Kerala.

1.1. Second Language Teaching and Learning

Language teaching and learning has been a part of educational curriculum from time immemorial. As Ronald V. White (1988: 7) remarks, “(e)ver since human groups speaking different languages made contact with each other, there has been a need to learn other languages while, since the development of urban civilizations [. . .] there has been a need to make provision for the teaching of other languages.” Learning and teaching another language, a second language, has thus been a part of educational curriculum in almost all cultures.

Learning a second language (L2) in an alien environment is different from learning a second language in its natural environment. In its natural environment the L2 is acquired naturally, through contact with the native speakers of that language, whereas it is taught formally in the classroom. The processes, methods
and strategies involved in these two situations are different (Krishnan, 1995: 3). When an L2 is taught in formal situations, as part of an educational curriculum, the prevalent system of education exerts a marked influence on it. Language then becomes “a body of esteemed information to be learnt, with an emphasis on intellectual rigor” (White, 1998: 8). In other words, language loses its lustre as a means of communication and becomes merely another subject to be learnt, with a finite syllabus, textbooks, teaching hours and an examination to pass at the end of the term.

Till the 1970s language teaching was mainly concerned with the procedure of teaching – how the language is taught. Since then, various developments in linguistics like the scientific study of languages spear-headed by Hornby, Skinner’s behaviourism, and most importantly, Chomsky’s transformational-generative linguistics, triggered off a shift of emphasis from procedure to design. These developments in linguistics further shifted the focus from the process of teaching a language to the process of learning a language. The strategies employed by the learner in learning or acquiring a language came to be considered as a decisive factor in language teaching.

1.1.1. English as a Second Language (ESL)

The emergence of English as a global language inevitably led to the emergence of English Language Teaching (ELT) as one of the most prominent units of language teaching. Today English is taught as a second language in
numerous countries, including India. ELT has now evolved into “a distinctive and independent profession” (White, 1988: 21), drawing its strength from the new theories of language learning and the innumerable research done in the area.

1.2. Patterns of Research in ELT

According to Nunan (1992: 3) “research is a systematic process of enquiry consisting of three elements [. . . ] (1) a question, problem or hypothesis, (2) data, (3) analysis and interpretation of data.” Hopkins defines research undertaken by teachers as “systematic self-conscious enquiry with the purpose of understanding and improving their practice” (qtd. in McDonough, 1997: 3).

The McDonoughs (1997) point out that both the topic of research and who does the research are equally important. It can be carried out either by external agents or by teachers themselves. External agents are those appointed by the ministry, or the national or local government. These agents may or may not be university-based researchers. The teachers involved in such projects then become the objects, rather than the participants, of the research.

Research may also be undertaken by teachers, either as individuals or as groups, or in collaboration with outside teachers. They may or may not be supported by the employer or the institution. It could thus be “individual and private” or “in the public domain” (McDonough, 1997: 16). That is, the teachers may be doing it for themselves – to solve certain problems they are facing – or
they may share the results "with others in an appropriate forum - meetings, conferences, journals and the like." Another group of researchers undertakes research as part of their postgraduate study at the Masters or MPhil or PhD level. They may be teachers or scholars and "(s)uch research may or may not be directly related to their own situation, and may or may not be intended to be taken back and applied there" (McDonough, 1997: 17).

As far as the object of research in ELT is concerned, research may focus on "classrooms, individuals, groups, the whole school environment, management styles, self and colleagues; [. . .] learning styles and strategies, learner characteristics, teaching methods and behaviours, whole programmes or components, language, materials and so on" (McDonough, 1997: 16).

The possible motivations for research range from the yearning for enhancing existing knowledge to the desire for implementing beneficial changes. In the case of external research, monitoring, evaluating and judging the staff may also be involved.

Finally, the attitude towards research is also important. Teachers themselves and/or learners/institutions/ministry may take a positive attitude, and encourage the researchers with full co-operation. Otherwise the effort may be rejected as immaterial and irrelevant, and a waste of time.

The above-mentioned points can be summarized diagrammatically as follows:
Fig. 1.
(Adapted from McDonough, 1997: 15)
1.2.1. Types of Research

As with the research undertaken in other areas of knowledge, in ELT also the following pairs of familiar terms are used to classify the various types of research.

➢ basic (pure) or applied
➢ interventionist or descriptive
➢ normative or interpretive.

Basic or pure research is primarily concerned with the advancement of theory, rather than practical utility. Applied research, on the other hand, is not about theory, but about application. It may be the research results that may be applied to particular language teaching problems, or the methodology used for obtaining those results.

Interventionist approach utilizes experimental methods which employ “a variety of techniques for separating out the variables in a situation so that the conclusion about what affected what can be drawn”, whereas descriptive research is about bringing out explicitly “the significant effects within the context itself” (McDonough: 44-45).

Normative approach is usually characterized by depiction by numbers, implication in terms of probability, application of experimental and quasi-experimental designs, generalization from sample to population, and the search for causes (McDonough: 48). Under the interpretive approach come a number of research traditions such as ethnography, ethnomethodology, and symbolic
interaction. Features of interpretive research include participant research, explication of context, local meanings of action, generalization, qualitative data, credible interpretations, and ethical considerations (McDonough: 51-53).

1.3 Classroom Research (CR)

In his preface to Leo van Lier’s The Classroom and the Language Learner: Ethnography and Second-language Classroom Research (TCLL), Christopher Candlin mentions how the “theorizing in second-language acquisition studies ignores the second-language classroom as a relevant source of data and as a relevant place to apply its findings” (Candlin, in van Lier, 1988: ix). There is often a tendency to mistake classroom research (CR) as one that focuses on “the inputs to the classroom (the syllabus, the teaching materials) or on the outputs from the classroom (learner achievement scores)”, whereas, CR, in fact, “simply tries to investigate what happens inside the classroom when learners and teachers come together” (Allwright, 1983: 191).

Van Lier broadly categorizes CR into two: “the anecdotal description based on field notes, and coding based on pre-determined checklists of categories” (TCLL 18). The first type is “potentially selective and subjective”, and there is a possibility of “even fictional treatment of goings-on.” The second type relies on “mechanical tabulation of superficially identifiable features, leading to mostly trivial findings.” There is a third type, which van Lier calls the “input-output studies.” This actually “circumvent(s) the classroom by focusing
only on what learners knew before versus what they knew afterwards, by means of pre- and post-tests. This can therefore not be called CR in any real sense of the term” (TCLL 18).

At its most narrow, classroom-centered research is in fact research that treats the language classroom not just as the setting for investigation but, more importantly, as the object of investigation. Classroom processes become the central focus. We want to understand why it is that things happen as they do in the classroom [. . .]. (Allwright, 1983: 191)

Allwright himself goes on to say that “this very narrow conception” is but too narrow to be applied to the existing state-of-the-art research works. However, whatever other concerns and concepts are added to expand this “narrow concept”, the fact remains that the prime focus of CR is what happens inside the classroom when the participants of the language-learning process, namely, the learners and the teacher, are brought together in the usual habitat for language learning, the classroom.

1.3.1. Why CR?

As van Lier himself muses, “the first question that needs to be asked is why we need information from the classroom directly” (TCLL 19). What is the necessity of CR, especially in a second-language teaching/learning/acquisition situation? The materials, methods and results are all so obvious and conclusive.
They are all good, solid data for research and analysis. What else can information “direct from the classroom” throw light upon?

According to Lorenz, “there are two main reasons for engaging in research: wanting to know, and wanting to help” (qtd. in TCLL 21). CR, when based on information “direct from the classroom”, can throw light on numerous issues in linguistics. It will be interesting to find out whether classroom instruction influences the sequence of language development in various learners, whether it affects the rate of development, how important is discourse that may be planned or otherwise in L2 development, and what are the ways in which learners alter their linguistic output in accordance with their circumstances.

These are but a few issues identified by van Lier (1988), and quite obviously only a study based on what is happening inside the classroom, on the happenings inside the classroom, can hope to find answers to these questions.

CR is all the more important, because, as van Lier points out, it “is probably the only branch of second-language acquisition research which speaks directly to the teacher” (TCLL 26). Only by bringing theory and research into the practical realm of second-language teaching/learning can the widening gap between the researcher and the practitioner, the teacher, be bridged. A study of the “inputs” and the “outputs” is not going to help a teacher if she wants to find out how or where she has to make modifications in her teaching style. Only a study of what happens inside the classroom, which naturally involves her as a participant, sometimes both as a researcher and as an informer, can help her. The
findings of the “input-output studies” deal mostly with “ideal situations”, far removed from the realities and limitations faced by the practicing teacher. Nor can the anecdotal or coding systems offer a valid, practical solution to particular problems in particular situations. In fact, they might even fail to identify the problem.

1.3.2. The Scope of CR

That CR cannot be put forth as a new panacea for finding solutions to the innate problems in other research methodologies is true. However, it remains a fact that the classroom is to be considered as a “necessary complement both as a source of data and as a criterion of relevance of findings” (TCLL 27). Some of the themes that are identified as central to CR are:

1. the nature and development of interlanguage;
2. the role of communication and interaction;
3. the use of strategies;
4. variations in learning: styles and modes;
5. the centrality of evaluation, including feedback and knowledge of results.

(TCLL 27)

It is obvious that CR can throw light on almost every aspect of L2 teaching and learning, beginning with the interlanguage to the evaluation procedure.

This study intends to focus on the second theme identified by van Lier, namely, interaction in the classroom. Though he has bracketed communication
along with interaction, which, of course, ought to be so, for the purpose of this particular study, the spotlight is on the aspect of interaction in the L2 classroom. This, however, does not in any way suggest that communication and interaction can be separated. In actuality, they are dovetailed together, but sadly enough, “the communication potential of the L2 classroom itself, and the authentic resources for interaction it has to offer” (TCLL 30) stand largely neglected. The scope of this study does not allow room for both, and hence the narrowing down of the range of this study to classroom interaction (CI).

1.4. Review of Past Research

It is impossible to capture the entire gamut of research work that has been done in the area of CR. An attempt has been made here to discuss some of the major projects undertaken in this area.

Allwright (1983: 194) points out that “(m)odern classroom centered research began in the fifties among teacher trainees and arose in response to the need to provide student teachers with adequate feedback on their teaching.”

In the sixties the different methods of teaching were ruling the roost, and the studies focused on teaching methods – for example, Scherer and Wertheimer in 1964, and Otto in 1969.

By the seventies the focus had shifted from method to technique. The Gothenburg English Teaching Method Project in Sweden, and Politzer in America undertook studies on the techniques used in the classroom. These
studies heralded the advent of research projects that recognized classroom processes as multi-faceted phenomena that needed a closer look and in-depth analysis. Allwright, by 1972, had moved on to looking at how teachers and learners together decide the involvement of each learner in the classroom procedures. In 1971 Moskowitz had developed FLINT, which Allwright (1983: 197) calls “the most widely known and used modification of” FIAC. In 1975 Sinclair and Coulthard developed the twenty-two category descriptive system, and in 1977 came Fanselow’s FOCUS.

Thus the tools of research were getting more refined and focused, and the thrust of the studies soon shifted from techniques to CI.

Between 1975 and 1979, Macnamara’s comparative study of learning L2 from the streets and inside the classroom, the studies by Holley and King, Corder, d’Anglejan, and Chun, all indicated that “the classroom environment actually inhibits L2 acquisition because it does not offer any opportunity for authentic communication” (Ellis, 1980: 30).

It was Corder, in 1967, who first made the distinction between intake and input. This was later taken up and elaborated in 1980, first by Faerch and Kasper, and again, more popularly, by Krashen. Krashen’s input hypothesis became well-established, according to which the most suitable input for L2 acquisition is the one modified to suit the learners’ proficiency and still including structures that are a little above the present level of proficiency.
Apart from his contribution of the input hypothesis and the monitor model for language acquisition, Krashen conducted a number of studies on classroom and language acquisition, including "Formal and Informal Linguistic Environments in Language Learning and Acquisition" (1976), "The Theoretical and Practical Relevance of Simple Codes in Second Language Acquisition" (1980), and *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* (1982).

He also teamed up with other scholars including Seliger and Jones, to conduct studies about the importance of formal instruction in the acquisition of L2, and found that classroom instruction does have a bearing on L2 acquisition, and is thus an important variable in the L2 learning process. In *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning* (1981), he also suggested that it is possible to accomplish learning and acquisition, both simultaneously, inside the classroom.

Seliger’s (1977) seminal study about high input generators (HIG) and low input generators (LIG) found that the nature of learner involvement in the L2 learning process has a definite and direct bearing on the L2 acquisition, and hence “that interaction type is a determining variable in the acquisition of L2” (Seliger, 1977: 263).

Gaies had already studied the teachers’ ability to adjust their classroom language to the level of their students in 1977, and his “The Investigation of Language Classroom Procedures” (1983) studied, instead of the linguistic
features of input, the nature of interaction between native speakers and L2 learners.

Hatch, and later Long, both stressed that in order to understand the process of L2 acquisition, the interaction ought to be examined and decoded first. Long conducted many studies on modified interaction, and found it to be “the necessary and sufficient condition for L2 acquisition” (cited in Tsui, 1985: 9). Long took up the Input Hypothesis of Krashen, and extended it into the Interaction Hypothesis. He was critical of the earlier descriptive studies, and moved on with his idea of connecting the characteristics of the “environmental” language and the development of L2 more systematically.

Chaudron is another scholar who conducted a number of studies on CI. In fact, he even identifies three major strands of research in modified interaction and L2 acquisition:

1. that target language modifications enhance perception and comprehension [. . .]

2. that linguistic modifications promote correct or meaningful target language use [. . .]

3. that learners acquire structures according to the frequency of occurrence of those structures in input. (Chaudron, 1983: 438)

Larsen-Freeman is another scholar to be mentioned for her studies on classroom and L2 acquisition. Over the years she has conducted numerous
studies including “The Importance of Input in Second Language Acquisition” (1979) and Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching (1986).

The study conducted by Pica, Young and Doughty (1987) about premodified input and interactionally modified input has become one of the milestones in CR. Its results supported the “theoretical claims regarding the role played by interactional modifications in facilitating second language comprehension [. . .] [and] also provide(d) guidelines for restructuring interaction in the classroom to serve learners’ needs for comprehensible input” (Pica, Young and Doughty, 1987: 737).

Moving on to the research projects on CI and the various aspects of CI, Amy B-M Tsui should perhaps be mentioned first. She proposed “a system for analyzing input and interaction in the classroom” (Tsui, 1985: 8), which was applied in two English language sessions in secondary schools in Hong Kong. It was found that meaningful communication had to become an essential ingredient in the process of language learning and teaching.

(C)lassroom interaction should be and can be a dynamic process which involves the co-operation of the teacher and the pupils so that optimal input can be obtained. [. . .] The classroom, therefore, has great potential for facilitating L2 acquisition. [. . .] (W)ell-exploited, the classroom can be an excellent place for L2 acquisition. Its full exploitation, however, begins with the teacher’s
awareness of the kind of input he has provided and the kind of interaction he has generated. (Tsui, 1985: 26)

She has several articles to her credit in the area of CR, including “Helping Teachers to Conduct Action Research in ESL Classrooms” (1993), “The ‘unobservable’ in Classroom Interaction” (1998), “Classroom Interaction Research” (2001), and has also authored *Introducing Classroom Interaction* (1995), which discusses CI, aspects of CI and methods for analyzing CI.

Malamah-Thomas’ *Classroom Interaction (Classroom)* (1987) is another cardinal work that deals with aspects of CI and Interaction Analysis (IA) in detail. The work is valuable thanks to the numerous examples it provides from real-life situations.

Wu’s (1993) investigation of the relationship between the four variables – question types, questioning strategies, student attitudes and patterns of interaction – was limited to ESL students in Hong Kong, but had a bearing on the questions asked by teachers in general. It concluded “that student attitudes play a very significant role in shaping classroom interaction [. . .] [and] to improve [the] situation, teachers need to know what follow-up moves are most conducive to second language learning, and what most harmful” (Wu, 1993: 66).

Allwright and Bailey, hailed as “two of the profession’s foremost advocates of the development of harmony between theory, research and practice” (Nunan, 2001: 205), argue that it is not the development of teaching
methods or syllabus development or evaluation that matters, but “what actually happens in the classroom.”

Being a good classroom teacher means being alive to what goes on in the classroom, alive to the problems of sorting out what matters, moment by moment, from what does not. And that is what classroom research is all about: gaining a better understanding of what good teachers (and learners) do instinctively as a matter of course, so that ultimately all can benefit. (Allwright and Bailey, qtd. in Nunan, 2001: 205)


Nunan is himself another oft-cited researcher in CR, with over a hundred publications to his credit. Over the years, he has conducted various studies on classroom, including “Action Research in Language Classroom” (1990), The

Tang (2001) cites a number of studies conducted about the hypothesis that the exposure of students to a profuse amount of graphics could facilitate the learning process quite automatically, including studies by Herber, Holliday, Vacca, Peeck, and Winn. Tang herself studied this question, at the intermediate level, and found that mere exposure is hardly enough. She suggests that the teachers have to “create an environment in which ESL students can make independent and constructive use of knowledge structures and graphics to work with literary demands and conceptual demands of content area” (Tang, 2001: 137).

Blair and Bourne, in their study in 1998, argue that learner expectations and learner perceptions while they are at school are important variables in deciding their behaviour and learning achievement.
Teunissen, while studying teacher behaviour found that teachers tend to be partial to the learners - they will have high expectations about some, and low expectations about others. “ ‘Highs’ get more and more difficult learning tasks, more feedback and also feedback with a richer content. ‘Lows’ get fewer questions in class, less difficult questions, less opportunity for response and less opportunity to pose questions than the ‘highs’ “ (Teunissen, qtd. in Leung, 2001: 178).

The many systems devised to analyze CI were used to study CI, and to analyze it quantity-wise. Not quite surprisingly, most of them ended up tabulating teacher talk or teacher questions or teacher-initiated CI. In 1971, Flanders, for instance, found that teacher-led presentations occupied 68% of classroom talk.

Other important quantitative systems include Moskowitz’s FLINT (developed by 1976), which like FIAC, looked at the social and pedagogic aspects of CI, and Bower’s Categories of Verbal Behaviour in the Language Classroom (developed by 1980) which tried for a better distinction between the pedagogic and social use of language than FLINT. In 1975 Sinclair and Coulthard used the verbal CI as data for their work on discourse analysis. There are a total of twenty-one acts in their system. Brown’s Interaction Analysis System was not specifically designed for the language classroom, but it has been applied successfully to the L2 classroom. It analyses verbal CI in order to understand the teaching/learning processes (Classroom 23-48).
The Mitchell and Parkinson instrument, Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) and Target Language Observation Scheme (TALOS) are all attempts to describe classroom methodologies –“the strategies, activities and techniques that the teachers employ to communicate their teaching point” (Classroom 60).

Separate studies by Harklau in 1994, and by Leung in 1993, report that among teacher-questions, higher cognitive or open-ended questions are scarce, and learner participation in most of the teacher-led exchanges is limited to phrases or single word utterances.

Studies have also suggested that a helpful teacher can build on and help develop the efforts of the students in expressing and communicating new or partial knowledge they have gained, and thus facilitate the language learning process.

Chaudron in 1988 listed a number of adjustments that happen in teacher-student interaction, which include repetition, expansion, clarification request, comprehension check, confirmation check and even pause.

Leung in 2001 stipulates that the chance for learners “to engage in sustained meaningful language use with the teacher” is very limited in a classroom. Say, if it is a 40-minute period, even if 20% of the class time is utilized for individual interaction, like question and answer, it gives 8 minutes for teacher-student interaction. If the strength of the students is 25, this means that 19.2 seconds on an average is available for each student. Even though this cannot
be put forward as a standard practice, it does point out the scarcity of opportunity for the learners.

McDonell in 1992 had already suggested group work as a sort of remedy to this problem. The advantages of group work are many: comprehensible input, initiation and articulation of own ideas, use of complex and varied forms of language, and, above all, practicing communication strategies.

Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (1993, cited in Foster, Online), however, stress that allotting group work to learners is not enough. There must be meaningful interaction between learners for fruitful results. They must negotiate meaning. This means that careful planning and organization as well as considerations of the learning context and also the readiness of the learners in participating in the task, are to be kept in mind while implementing group work.

Cummins, in 1992, distinguishes between the type of language used in everyday interaction and formal communication. His conceptual framework contains basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). The first involves context-rich environment but very little cognitive demand, the second, context-reduced environment and high cognitive demand. The argument is that if the L2 input is made more context-embedded, it will become easily comprehensible.

Leung is of the opinion that context-embeddedness is rather relative: it depends on the prior and current knowledge, experience and background of the learners. Something that is context-rich for one student need not be so for
another. In fact, Mohan and Helmer, while studying the development of interpreting gestures by the L2 learner, stress that context is actually something that is interpreted, even learned, and not something that is given (Mohan, Leung and Davison, 2001: N. pag.).

Among the numerous studies conducted on CI in large classes, the work of Sarwar is known for planning and carrying out the research work on “communicative language techniques and activities that would be effective in large classes of 100+” (Sarwar, 2001: 127). In her study on techniques of individualization for large classes, she suggests that in countries like Pakistan and India solutions to the existing problems such as large classes, limited materials and resources and rote learning combined with spoon-feeding as the usual strategies for learning and teaching, have to be worked out realistically, taking into consideration all the constraints of the situation.

There are innumerable projects undertaken in the area of ethnography as applied to anthropology, sociology and other social sciences. Since they do not have any direct bearing on the present topic, attention is turned to ethnographic studies in linguistics and education.

The transfer of the idea of cultural transmission from anthropology to education was pioneered by George Spindler in the 1950s. He is, in fact, often credited with producing classics on the ethnography of schooling.

Hymes is often cited as a major contributor to the growth and development of ethnography in relation to linguistics. His essay on “The
Ethnography of Speaking” (1962) is described as a “seminal essay [...] which drew together themes and perspectives from a range of anthropological, literary and linguistic scholarship” (Bauman and Sherzer, 1973: 3). Over the years he has conducted quite a number of ethnographic studies on a range of topics, from cross-cultural personality study to ethnographies of communication (along with Gumperz). While assessing the contributions of ethnography to bilingual education, he had also elaborated on ethnographic monitoring (1981).

In 1973 came Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking by Bauman and Sherzer. It was proclaimed to be an outgrowth of the Conference on Ethnography, which was held in April 1972, and which saw the coming of age of the ethnography of speaking. It included a wide range of ethnographic studies including those on Colombian Vaupes Indians, ritual language of the Rotinese, conventions and speech routines in an Antiguan village, norms of speech in a Malagasy community, and even the use of language by Quakers, which is an example of applying ethnography to history as well. Thanks to the comprehensive nature of ethnography, any aspect of life and language can be meat for an ethnographer.

Erickson is another proponent of the ethnographic approach in education. Through numerous studies, conducted alone and in collaboration with others such as Florio, Bremme and Shultz, he has looked into various issues. In 1977 he outlined the microethnographic approach, and followed it up in later studies, thus chiseling out the approach.
Other researchers such as Carrasco, Au, Jordan and Mohatt, alongside Erickson, took up research projects to show the benefits of microethnographic study when applied to the education of minority culture children. In Trueba, Guthrie and Au (1981), an invaluable collection of such studies, including those of Erickson, Mehan, Hymes and others, are brought together: Florio and Walsh present “a longitudinal ethnographic case study [. . .] of the collaborative relationship of the teacher and researcher in classroom research”; van Ness scrutinizes “the social organization of behaviour in getting ready for reading in an Alaskan classroom”; Au and Jordan analyze “a successful reading programme for Hawaiian children”; Le Compte tries the traditional ethnographic approach sans the video “to identify the hidden curriculum - norms, values and behaviour patterns” which is obviously different and thus create trouble for the minority children (Trueba, Guthrie and Au, 1981: 11 – 12).

Next to Hymes, Erickson and Mehan, comes van Lier, perhaps the most famous ethnographer of CI. Van Lier’s *The Classroom and the Language Learner* (1988) remains the bible for researchers in the ethnographic study of CI. In it he places the L2 classroom in its context, outlines the aims of L2 CR, describes the methods and topics of L2 CR before going on to look at CI in the L2 classroom in detail. It balances theory with practical aspects, with extracts from real-life situations in L2 classrooms to illustrate his points. From its erudite preface by Candlin, and equally valuable introduction by van Lier, it is packed with information through out, till the appendix, which details transcription and its
conventions, and the 13-page bibliography. It is a treasure house of valuable information for students and researchers of classroom ethnography.

He has also written numerous articles as well as several books on CI, both in English and Dutch. In a later study he discusses the teacher-student interaction and the student-student interaction to conclude, “interaction is particularly beneficial for learning when it is contingent” (van Lier, 2001: 102).

Byram is another leading figure in the area of classroom ethnography. His “Teaching-and-Learning Language-and-Culture” (1994) is often recommended as a concise introduction to the topic of intercultural aspects in language teaching/learning. *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective* (1998), which he edited along with Fleming, another prominent name in classroom ethnography, is a collection of fourteen papers spawned by two seminars at Durban University in the 1990s. Beginning with Kramsch’s appeal for replacing the term “native speaker” with “intercultural speaker”, it contains papers on different contexts at the secondary and tertiary education in several countries.

Another valuable contribution to research studies in this area is *English Language Teaching in its Social Context* (2001), edited by Candlin and Mercer. It is the second volume in a series, and with the heavily-charged Introduction by the editors, which explores the ideas of language learning, researching, strategies and goals in CR and so on, it is a “must-read” for classroom ethnographers. The book is divided into three parts, and includes several key articles by various prominent authors like Ellis, van Lier, Breen, Nunan, Long, and Mercer himself. All the
articles are highly informative and relevant, though a few among these, like those by van Lier, Roberts, Canagarajah, and Chick stand out for studies based in classrooms. Canagarajah’s ethnographic study of an ESOL classroom in Sri Lanka, Chick’s study of the parameters for safe-talk in the apartheid South African classroom, Breen’s explication of his concept of the classroom as a culture which ought to be treated as unique, and which has its own hidden potentials for communication, all add lustre to the value of the collection.

The third part especially is of immense importance with its articles dealing with observing, recording, transcribing and analyzing classroom data - in short, about conducting a CR. It is titled “Analyzing Teaching and Learning”, and aptly so, with papers by Gibbons, Lin and Slimani elucidating their research projects in CR. These are generously strewn across with extracts from experiences of CI. Swann’s invaluable piece on the various methods of recording, transcribing, and analyzing classroom data is perhaps the best guide, offering valuable tips for a classroom ethnographer.

Another researcher, whose work though not directly related to the area under consideration, but has significant influence on it, is Vygotsky. Belonging to the school of social interactionists in Psychology, he is remembered for his concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It is explained as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, qtd. in Barnaby 2002: 14). Williams and Burden (1997: 66)
view it as being “complementary to interlanguage theory” in terms of language learning.

ZPD is defined as “(t)he domain where learning can most productively take place” (Mitchell and Myles, 1998: 146). This enables the teachers to help learners get on with the process of learning through what has come to be called scaffolding, which means “(t)he process of supportive dialogue which directs the attention of the learner to key features of the environment, and which prompts them through suggestive steps of a problem” (Mitchell and Myles, 1998: 145). Van Lier warns that if the scaffolding is not “undone” gradually and carefully, it will lead to breeding “dependence and helplessness” (van Lier, 2001: 96).

The research work already done in the area is thus quite vast, and innumerable projects are going on in various universities around the world. For instance, there is the Digital Ethnography Project (DEP) by Jay B. Crain and Allan C. Darrah, “an innovative and versatile tool for storage, retrieval and analytical processing of ethnographic and historical texts” (The Digital Ethnography Project, Online). The Spencer Symposium was conducted on March 22, 2002, which included dialogue sessions on “Language, Space and Power: An Ethnography of a Dual Language Class”, “Effects of Friendship Networks on High school and Collage Achievement”, “Memorialization at ‘Ground Zero’ - Multiple Meanings of the World Trade Center Site”, “Exploring Teachers’ Instructional Strategies in an Urban Science Classes”, and “The Role Violence Plays in a Fourth Grade Urban Classroom”. The annual conference on
ethnography, organized by various graduate programmes in Chicago (in collaboration) is meant for presentations from graduate students based on ethnographic methods, including field research, in-depth interviews, original research findings and other forms of qualitative fieldwork. The fifth annual conference on ethnography was conducted on March 1, 2003, and had as its theme “Politics, Ethics and Ethnography”.

It would be possible to find at least one article on CR or CI or classroom ethnography in any leading ELT journal, not to mention the projects undertaken at the graduate, post-graduate and doctoral levels in education, language and literature. Only those which are considered as milestones in the areas in CR, CI and ethnographic study of CI have been mentioned here, which by no means should be considered an exclusive list.

The studies also emphasize the importance of CR and studies in CI with regard to improving the ESL teaching/learning situation. However, no major studies in CR and CI in relation to improving the present scenario of ELT in Kerala has been conducted so far, and this study is an attempt at bringing together theory, research and practice of teaching ESL in Kerala.

The basic assumption of this research is, in fact, a question posed by van Lier: “Since interaction is a defining characteristic of the L2 classroom, how can it be exploited to promote language development optimally?” (TCLL 91).
1.5. English in Kerala

English occupies a very important position in Kerala. It is used as a medium of instruction, is taught as a language, and extensively used for communication. English medium schools are exceedingly popular in the state, and are the first choice for those parents who can afford it. English movies and English serials have high ratings among viewers here. The ability to understand and use English with ease is considered an asset by the large majority of Keralites. Even the minority who will proudly declare that they give priority to Malayalam will not, however, denounce or renounce English. Every one realizes the significance of English as the global language, the window to a world of opportunities (Prasad, 1998: 20).

1.5.1. ELT in Kerala

Despite the special status assigned to English by the Malayalees, Kerala’s ELT scenario is pathetically backward in catching up with the latest trends. In India, and in Kerala, there are a handful of schools that groom their students properly, and even exceptionally well. Unfortunately these happen to be the elite group, out of reach of the common people. If the majority of India’s population consists of the middle and lower-middle class people, then they learn English in the written form, rather than the spoken form. They end up with an inadequate knowledge of the language and a lack of confidence to use it after more than a decade of learning it.
The defect of the English teaching/learning system in Kerala becomes evident when average students in moderate circumstances decide to pursue higher academic prospects or careers. They find that the textbooks and reference books are written mainly in English, and that there are no Malayalam equivalents for a large chunk of technical terms. Whether to use the computer, the Internet and e-mail, or for a career abroad, their proficiency in English becomes a deciding factor.

Though current theories about L2 acquisition underscore and accentuate the role of learner participation, the teachers in this part of the world still rule the classrooms despotically with a stern face and dreary monologues. The maximum extent they will go to involving the learners might be a grammar exercise or a repetition drill. The sole aim is to “cover the portions” before the examinations commence. As for those teachers, who are conversant with the latest theories of language learning and interaction, and who are the exceptions rather than the rule, they find their attempts to churn out a learner-oriented session meeting with an angry complaint from the next-room teacher or even parents. “Her classes are too noisy; they distract my students”, complains the former. “If she goes on playing games, how will she finish the portions before the examinations?” laments the latter. This means that the failure to dismantle a teacher-dominated class cannot be attributed solely to the teachers. Other factors such as severe time-constraint, the attitude of fellow teachers and that of the parents dampen the enthusiasm of the English teacher in due course.
1.6. Background for this Research

The ELT scenario in Kerala remains curiously indifferent to the revolutionary changes that are upsetting the apple carts elsewhere. CI, or rather the lack of it, is a major issue faced by English learners all over the State, even across the country. It is a live issue in ELT across the world: the theoreticians are always on the look out to improve it, and its practitioners range from those who have never heard of it to those who actually put it into practice in their sessions.

Also, it is intriguing that all these schoolteachers, batches and batches of them undergoing the rigorous and often vigorous BEd course, seem to follow the routine and fall into the rut in no time. It seems that none of them want to break the rule, and to think about the quality of language their students are exposed to and are acquiring. They seem unperturbed about the quality of their teaching. Apart from the question of power and authority, the time- and other social constraints, and simple indifference, there may be other reasons lurking behind the scene. When science or history teachers are assigned to teach languages in schools, that too even at the secondary and higher-secondary levels, indifference might set in for want of interest and/or competence in the language. When teachers themselves do not care for the language they are teaching, naturally they cannot be expected to instill interest and enthusiasm in the learners.

Obviously, in a teacher-oriented classroom all activities will be influenced directly by the teacher. As already hinted at, these teachers might not be conscious of the results of their teaching. “Results” mean here the language
learning process and language acquisition, and not the marks scored in the examinations. It would be useful to find out through a research project based on the teacher’s activities the positive and negative aspects of classroom procedures dictated by them.

A quantitative study alone cannot properly unfurl such underlying yet very significant issues in the classroom proceedings. Hence a qualitative study was employed to complement the quantitative study in order to explore the mechanics of CI.

Moreover, there is no dearth of studies on the different affective variables in the classroom, such as the backgrounds of teachers and learners, the social, economic, financial, even racial and religious factors that affect classroom proceedings, how they perform outside the classroom, their competence, their performance, the gap between the two, and a whole lot of other issues. What happens within the classroom did hog the limelight finally, but most often the studies were quantitative in nature. It seemed challenging to complement a quantitative analysis with a qualitative one, as has been the plea of ELT scholars.

1.6.1. Rationale

The deplorable state of teaching and learning English in the educational institutions, especially at the lower-middle and middle-class sections of the society in Kerala has been criticized often enough, and several studies have examined the ESL classroom here from the sociological, psychological and other
extraneous perspectives. The situation actually calls for a study that focuses on what actually happens inside the classroom, once the teacher and the students come together for 45 minutes per day, sometimes more, for learning English.

Such a study, by trying to examine the CI from the perspective of the participants, can bring to light the as yet undiscovered potential factors inside the classroom that can be effectively utilized for the betterment of ESL learners. Because in whatever way the course and the materials and the rest of the components of the curriculum are modified, how these are utilized by the teacher for her learners inside the classroom is what really matters. That is what can really bring about a change in the scenario.

It thus simmers down that the interaction between teacher and learners inside the classroom, or CI, has more potential than has been realized by the teachers. Interaction in the target language in the L2 classroom is of particular significance for teachers, learners and researchers. Interaction provides exposure, experience and practice for the learners in using the target language. As a lesson commences, progresses and concludes – successfully or otherwise – the target language is constantly being used. Inevitably, the interaction that happens within the classroom possesses certain aspects, and is sure to follow certain patterns. Identifying these aspects, and examining how these aspects affect one another and also the interaction generated in the classroom, is certain to unravel the unseen yet potential dynamics of the classrooms.
Moreover, an understanding of the mechanics of the happenings within the classroom will enable the teachers and learners to formulate or modify their teaching/learning strategies accordingly. This in turn will yield better teaching and learning performances and results.

There exists a strong belief that it is possible for a resourceful teacher to utilize and exploit a badly designed curriculum for the maximum benefit of the learners. The interaction that is generated in the classroom will then become the major instrument for this.

1.6.2. Objectives of the Study

The present study is an attempt to examine what happens in the classroom when the teacher and the learners come together to learn ESL. It proposes to investigate how these two crucial factors of CI, that is, the teacher and the learners, interact with each other, and understand how this interaction affects the CI that is generated thereby. This will help to obtain a better understanding of the dormant complexities of classroom teaching and learning.

1.6.3. Hypotheses

Even though a qualitative approach discourages a pre-conceived hypothesis for the study, a rough framework was thought to be useful. Thus, the following are the three major hypotheses of this study.
**Hypothesis I.**

The verbal and non-verbal behaviours of the teacher and students in a second language classroom affect each other, and this, in turn, decides the pattern of interaction that takes place in the classroom.

**Hypothesis II.**

Classroom interaction has a direct and definite bearing on the language learning process as a whole, and oral communication skills in particular, which can be exploited for producing better learning results.

**Hypothesis III.**

Active participation of the learners in the classroom interaction is a must for effective language learning to take place.

These are formulated to serve as a flexible framework for the qualitative study, and not as straitjacket hypotheses into which the results of this study must fit in. In fact, it is hoped that the present study will yield some insight into the proceedings of the language classroom that will be helpful for both teachers and learners in the L2 teaching/learning situation.

1.6.4. Organization of this Thesis

This chapter, meant as a general introduction, has provided a brief introduction to the main concerns of this study: English as an L2, research in ELT, and CR. It has also traced past work in the area, as well as current research
in CI, and outlined the background, rationale, objective and hypotheses of the study.

Chapter II deals in detail the characteristics of CI, IA, and the varieties, features, advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative approaches to the analysis of CI.

Chapter III is about the research method adopted for this study: the research methods, procedure, collection of data, informants, primary data, secondary data, and tools of data analysis.

Chapter IV presents the analysis of data, using both the quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Chapter V concludes the study. It states the findings of the analysis and the testing of the hypotheses in the light of these findings, then discusses the results of the study, its application/relevance to L2 teaching/learning, and suggestions for further research/experimentation/alterations that could be done in the area of CI in ELT.

The appendices give the transcript conventions used, the transcripts of lessons which are the primary data for this research, samples of questionnaires and uptake recall chart that were used to collect the secondary data, and excerpts from interviews with the participant teachers.