CHAPTER 9
FURTHER VERIFICATION TEST

I Background

In the earlier investigation regarding the comprehension of poetry in the learners' first language or mother tongue and in second language, we found that there wasn't much difference. We had prepared three sets of questions - Multiple choice questions, testing the obvious, literal meaning of the verbal expressions in the poem; Descriptive type questions, requiring the learner to explain the underlying meaning in the poem; and questions which sought their overall appreciation of the poems. The learners were all undergraduate students in the urban and rural areas of Maharashtra. They were 125 in number with roughly an equal number of male and female learners. The statistical results in brief were the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marathi</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice questions</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive type questions</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall appreciation</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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</table>

The table shows the increase in difficulties as one moves from the literal meaning to the poetic meaning. It also shows the number of students who succeeded in answering satisfactorily the relevant questions.

While analysing the data we wondered about the possible reasons for the lack of comprehension. That there is not much difference in comprehending poetry in the first
COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

language (Marathi) and in second language (English) clearly shows that linguistic comprehension at the poetic level is different from the comprehension of language in ordinary usage. I. A. Richards (1929) gives ten different difficulties of the undergraduate students at Cambridge in understanding English poetry. We were not sure whether the difficulties faced by the 125 students were the same or whether there were some other difficulties. We were not sure also about the exact differences between the ten difficulties mentioned by Richards. Therefore we decided to have one more verification test which would be designed following I. A. Richards's analysis. We then selected a batch of 20 new undergraduate learners in the urban area of Nasik and a batch of 20 new undergraduate learners from the rural area of Shirpur District in Dhule. The earlier test was administered in the urban areas of Poona and Jalgaon and the rural areas of Jalgaon.

II Selection of Poems

We selected one simple poem in Marathi (Una Hivalyatiia Sirasirata by Vinda Karandikara) and a poem called 'Harry Pearce' by David Campbell. Both the poems were used earlier in different anthologies in English and in Marathi. The poems are given in appendix 'C'. We then took I.A. Richards's discussion about each of the ten difficulties and tried to devise questions that would point out the difficulties. In the Marathi poem we could not frame any question that would indicate what Richards calls Doctrinal adhesions. The questionnaires are given in appendix 'C'. We will discuss the appropriateness and the purpose of each
question in the light of the question in length of the
difficulties stated by Richards when we present the analysis.

III Interpretation

For Richards the most disturbing fact about the
comprehension of poetry is the difficulty that the
undergraduate learners find in making out the plain sense of
poetry. Richards talks about the plain sense of expression,
its plain overt meaning which has no direct relation with
its poetic significance. The misapprehension of feeling, tone
and intention constitutes this difficulty. It seems that by
sense Richard means the communicative meaning of an ordinary
expression.

Making Out the Plain Sense of Poetry

a> Sense

In the English poem we have the expression 'saw in
mirage' which means the poet saw a mirage in which he saw
Henry Pearce. Thus one who understands the sense would choose
the alternative 'C'. Throughout the poem the word 'Time' has
an all pervading presence and therefore it is written with
the capital letter. Time does not mean a punctual moment but
an infinite duration. Unless the learner understands this he
will not be able to make any sense of the last stanza. One
who understands the last stanza would automatically choose
the alternative 'C'. The last line of the poem contains an
expression such as "when time with us has had his will". Time
having fulfilled his will with us has the obvious meaning
"when we die". Therefore the alternative 'a' in i(c) is the
expected answer. There was only one learner in the forty
learners who got all the three meanings. Alternative 'c' from
COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

1(a) was selected by seven, C from 1(i), (b) by nine learners and (a) from 1(i), (e) seven. Even if we consider a learner who got only one answer correct he has the ability to understand what Richards calls sense. Only 19% of the learners have got this ability. In the case of the Marathi poem we have the expression 'dagadala lochha ankura phutane' which means the 'stone has a wish' that is alternative 'b' in the question 1(i). Twenty learners that is 50% of the learners got this sense. It is noteworthy that in case of English only 19% as opposed to this 50% have got the sense of linguistic expression.

b> Feeling

If sense is some state of affairs, feeling is the feeling about this state of affairs that is one's attitude or bias towards the state of affairs. The last two lines of the English poem give us a feeling that the world will continue to remain the same for ever. Only eight learners that is 20% of the learners got this feeling. In the Marathi poem we tried to test the feeling with the help of the choice of vocabulary items. The poem contains a word 'vruđha' (old man) that is used to indicate respect and is frequent in formal style. In Qn. 1(iii)(a) we have got two more synonyms 'mhatara' and 'therada'. The last word is derogatory whereas the second word lacks formality and decency. In the poem, 'the tree wearing a crown' generates a feeling of respect and therefore the question whether one can use the other two synonyms requires a negative answer. 25 learners that is 62.5% of the learners gave the negative answer. Question 'b' in 1(iii) on the other hand is about the overall
feeling aroused by the sunlight. The sunlight creates an impression of naughtiness, therefore answer 'c' in question 1(iii)'b' is the expected answer. Only one learner that is 5% of the learners got the feeling which the poem produces. Comparing the two questions one finds that when the learner is asked a specific question about the lexical item, he is much better than when the question is regarding the overall feeling created by the poem. Considering both the English and the Marathi poem one finds that if one moves from the meaning of the lexical item to the implication of the specific sentences and then to the suggestiveness of the entire text, there is an ascending scale of difficulties in getting the feeling expressed in the poetic language.

c> Tone

Richards talks about the speaker's attitude towards his listeners, which he calls tone. It is difficult to state exactly the attitude of the poet towards his readers with the help of the poem especially when the poem has the potentiality of plurality of interpretations. We tried to grasp the attitude by asking a very general question about the poem. We are not sure whether the questions lead to what Richards calls the attitude of the speakers to the listener. Question 1(iii) in the English questionnaire tests the overall result of the poem, that is related to the poet's attitude. The poem makes the reader think rather than make him sad or happy. Only 15 learners out of 40 that is 37.5% got this answer. In the case of the Marathi poem question 1(iii) 'b' is more significant where the option shows the attitude. The poem creates a complex of pleasant reaction.
towards the moving sunlight. The choice of (iii) (b) 'c' would indicate this. Only three learners that is 7.5% got this answer. The steep fall in getting the tone in the Marathi poem as compared to that of the English poem is surprising. However we do not think that the question in both the questionnaires has a different degree of difficulty.

d> Intention

For Richards 'intention' is the fourth element in making out the plain sense. The intention operates in a combination of other functions. It influences the language in that the whole argument pattern is controlled by the intention. The poet may directly address the reader (of iv (a)) or he may show his intention through the handling of the theme. Question i (iv) b in the English questionnaire and question i (iv) in the Marathi questionnaire are the questions about the poet's intention. It seems that 15% of the learners got the intention in the English poem whereas 10% of the learners got the intention in the Marathi poem. The difference in the two is marginal and it may be so because of a single answer expected in the Marathi questionnaire.

Making out the plain sense of the poem is a difficulty almost of the same magnitude in comprehending the Marathi and the English poem. The similarity and the dissimilarity of the findings cannot be easily linked to the simple linguistic competence. The nature of the poem, its pattern of presentation, the levels at which the sense, feeling, tone and intention are tested and the nature of the questionnaire itself are largely responsible for the
COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

ii) Sensuous Apprehension

The second barrier to the comprehension of poetry for Richards is the difficulties of sensuous apprehension, for Richards words have form, a movement and a rhythm. A sensitive reader perceives the form and the movement whereas a non-sensitive reader may ignore it. Rhythm does not mean however a rigid material form. The poem as a whole has its own rhythm and it works in conjunction with the sense and and feeling. For Richards reading poetry well is an extremely difficult task. In the questionnaire it was not possible to test the comprehension of the subtleties in rhythmical form. We based questions on obvious rhythmical elements for example, in the English questionnaire question II(a) tests how a student reads a poem, out of the five alternatives, we expect him to say that he spends most of the time in reading each line. Similarly we want him to be aware that the word 'Gundagai' rhymes with the word 'sky'. Only 13 learners (32.5%) could see the rhyme. Seven learners (17.5%) said that they require the same amount of time for reading each line. About 17 learners read full sentences in the poem and those who have to stop in the middle of the reading for finding the meaning outnumber these seven. Question No. II is a question regarding the obvious elements that constitute rhythm and still 70% of the learners fail on that count. In the Marathi poem Question No. II (a) gives a line and asks the learner whether it fits into the general rhythm of the poem. The line given cannot fit in for the obvious reason. Only 15 learners (37.5%) could perceive the rhythm unsuitability of the
COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

line. Question No. II (b) suggests alternate recognition of four lines in the poem and asks the learner to state which alternative does not disturb the rhythm of the poem. Only one reader (2.5%) could detect the rhythm disturbing the lines. Again since the questionnaire tests sensuous apprehension on the basis of different elements in the rhythmical pattern, the results of all the four items cannot be of equal importance. But the fact remains that 70% of the learners don't show any sign of sensuous apprehension even when it is not tested on the subtler elements of the poetic form.

iii Imagery

The third source of I. A. Richards's difficulties lies in Imagery. Comprehending the images however is not always necessary. Richards says some readers can reach any and every state of thought and feeling without making use of images. Richards also thinks that it is difficult for the external observer to trace the relations between the poem and the experience of the reader and the complex relation between the two. However if the meaning of the poem is embodied in certain images one is justified in testing their comprehension. In the English poem, the poem vividly presents a picture of Harry driving his cart in the heat and dust. Question no III in the questionnaire is a simple and straightforward device to know whether the learner has his visualization. Only eleven learners (27.5%) got this visual picture. In the Marathi poem Question no III (a) also asks for the visual picture the poem creates. There also almost the same number of learners (Twelve learners i.e. 30%) succeeded Question no III (b) shows the complex relations
COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

between the learners' experience and the poem. One learner for example finds that the last stanza creates a picture 'one should be ashamed of' another learner jumps to the abstraction of sorrow following happiness, a third learner sees in the last stanza a dismal picture of severe cold, a fourth learner, with the help of the diminishing heat of the sunlight, conjures up the picture of a quiet evening, whereas, a fifth learner reads the last stanza as if it depicts the scene from a child's point of view. In any case the number of learners who have a sense, an awareness of imagery is only 30%. The rest 70% either don't require it or have unrelated images.

iv) Irrelevant Associations

For Richards the powerful and pervasive influence mnemonic irrelevance also could be a barrier in poetic comprehension. Richards admits that the personal situation of the reader inevitably affects his reading and that many readers are drawn to poetry in quest of some reflection in poetry of their latest emotional crisis. There is nothing wrong in having memories of an emotional crisis or of some incidents observed as long as they are relevant and genuine and do not affect the autonomy of the poem. But when recollected feelings overwhelm and distort the poem, they pose a danger to the feelings active in the poem. Question no. IV(a) is a simple question about whether the learner remembers something of his past when he reads the poem. Only 14 learners (35%) said the poem made them remember some old man they knew. Seven learners (17.5%) had no such past association and nineteen learners (47.5%) did not answer the
question. But this shows that 35% of the learners do read poetry with a past association. Question no IV (ii) in the English questionnaire asks the learners to state the incident if any, they remember. Here again twelve learners (30%) had nothing to narrate and sixteen learners that is (40%) did not answer. Twelve learners that is (30%) reported that the poem reminded them of a parallel incident. It is therefore difficult to decide the relevance or irrelevance of the memories of the learners. The only thing we can say is that in the case of 30% of the learners personal intrusions in reading the poem occur. In the case of the Marathi poem the number of learners who have personal intrusions is larger twenty three that is 57%, the degree of irrelevance however is very high. One learner remembers, the pleasantness of sunshine when he was quivering in the cold in Kashmir. Only two learners state different locations where it is possible to have the same experience, expressed in the poem. The higher percentage of revival of personal memories in reading poetry in the first language is significant.

v) Stock Responses

Richards recognised the need and the presence of stock responses or ready-made responses in human life. In many fields of life conventionalised reactions or stereotyped responses are necessary as the supplies of mental energy are too meagre to make every response original. A stock response is a convenience but in reading poetry it may prove to be dangerous. Poetry demands emotional responses that are genuine and relevant. Stock responses, on the other hand, are unreal and they don't respect the autonomy and liberty of the
COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

poem. They often distort the poem in an attempt to have standardisation of ideas and levelling down of differences in experience. Richards also states some causes of stereotyped reactions. In the case of poetry if the stock response is the result of parasitic development or of an sufficient experience elaborated into a system that hides the real world, the situation is detrimental to the appreciation of poetry.

We gave three ready-made but incomplete stock responses in the English poem and asked the learners to complete them if possible. Twenty six learners that is 65% did not complete the sentences. It may be because they refuse to have stock responses or because they just could not answer the question. Fourteen learners that is 35% completed the statements, for example, there were answers such as - the poem is about time or noon or work or work in life. Some of the answers such as 'the poem is about happy' were ungrammatical and incomprehensible. When we asked the question whether such statements are necessary when writing about a poem, out of these fourteen students seven did not answer the question. only two felt the need of such a statement and five did not. This result is unanalysable, as no learner gave any elaborate answers. The only thing that is obvious is that 35% of the learners did know some stock responses. In the case of the Marathi poem the percentage is doubled that is 72.5%. In the case of the Marathi poem most of the stock responses are quite predictable, for example. The language of the poem is described by adjectives such as 'sopi' (easy), sarala (straightforward), 'goda' or 'madhura' (sweet). The difference between the number of
students completing the stock responses in Marathi and English is traceable to their linguistic experience. Since Marathi is used for wider communication, learners have learnt ready-made responses more and easily. We tried to find out whether poetic appreciation and its expression also have a ready-made pattern in VI(b) in the Marathi questionnaire. 30% of the learners answered the question and they had more or less the same pattern in their answers.

vi) Sentimentality

Richards defines sentimentality either as a response of the sentiments which is too great for the occasion or as a crude emotion or as an inappropriate response because of some over persisting tendencies. We concentrated only on the first meaning of sentimentality. In question VI (a) in English we gave three possible reactions to the poem out of which the first two could be called sentimental. In question no VI in the Marathi questionnaire we had the same strategy. Twenty four learners in both answered the questions. The sentimental answer was chosen by fifteen learners in both the groups. Fifteen learners out of twenty four that is 62% of the learners who responded in both the groups showed the signs of the first type of sentimentality. As far as sentimentality is concerned it seems that the percentage is equally high in English and Marathi.

vii) Inhibition

In overacting to the situation of sentimentality undue curtailment of emotion is inhibition for Richards. Inhibition results or stems from sentimental fixation and
they blackout aspects of experience that make the mind healthy. Inhibition is 'hard heartedness' which prevents free expansive emotion. Question no VII in both the questionnaires is a very elementary attempt at finding out whether inhibition was one of the barriers to comprehension. In the English questionnaire we asked two simple Yes/No questions. Learners who said 'Yes' could be suspected of inhibition. For example, calling Harry Pearce an unkind man, for beating his bullocks and remembering the poem for this unkindness, doesn't allow the learner to understand that the poem is a visual representation of the way a farmer lives. In the Marathi questionnaire answers such as 'I don't like the image' would indicate the fear of the learner to face the image presented in the poem. Such answers suggest the cause for the possibility of curtailing emotional responses. In English only twenty six learners answered the first question out of which sixteen learners, that is, 61.5% showed inhibition. In Marathi twenty two learners answered the question out of which thirteen, that is, 59% showed inhibition. This shows 60% of the learners on an average in both groups show signs of inhibition. This tallies with the 62% of learners who show signs of sentimentality. Richards calls sentimental response as a confinement to a stereotype and says that this confinement or fixation is possible only if it is a result of inhibition, that is, inhibitions are the cause of sentimentality. The almost equal percentage of the learners in respect of the two difficulties in poetic apprehension confirms the relation between sentimentality and inhibition. Again irrespective of the language both sentimentality and inhibition are very high (about 60%) in
viii) Doctrinal Adhesions

For Richards a poem gives or implies a set of beliefs. A reader may have problems if he strongly has reservations about the beliefs. Richards makes a distinction between intellectual belief and emotional belief. So it is possible to understand the emotional belief withholding intellectual belief. On the other hand a good poem has its quality of sincerity, as far as its set of beliefs is concerned. If a poem is a religious poem doctrinal adhesions on the part of the reader may create problems.

The poems we have selected are not religious poems. In fact in the case of the Marathi poem it is difficult to even find the implied beliefs as the poem is a plain description. It does not arouse any contemplation of the issue mentioned by Richards. The assumptions about tenderness, gentle behaviour, pleasantness of mind could be called a set of emotional beliefs, but we found it very difficult to test them by using the device of a questionnaire. In the case of the English poem we made an experiment. The second line of the second stanza shows the 'energetic activity of old Harry'. He swears, whips the bullocks as he drives them on. Swearing does not have any necessary religious implication. We felt that this could be used to find out whether the learners do have some beliefs about swearing that interfere when they read the poem. We know that the effort has pitfalls and requires a very careful interpretation. Question no VIII in the English questionnaire...
COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

contains five sub-questions which would arouse the dormant beliefs in the learners' mind. Once a learner is made to think about swearing in his own philosophical perspective, we felt that the last question 'e' would be a good indicator of his beliefs that may come in while reading the poem. Only six (15%) students out of forty answered the last question and 50% of them, that is, only three felt the need of having an explicit understanding of the philosophy of appreciating the poem. This makes us feel that 50% of the undergraduates may have to face the problem of what Richards calls doctrinal adhesions if the poem does express strongly a set of beliefs.

ix) Technical Presuppositions

Richards considers technical presuppositions as difficulties in understanding poetry. This means considering something well done in a poetic instance to be useful for all instances and not approving any change. It also means discrediting something for all the time on the basis of its failure in one instance. In short this is a case of mistaken means for ends and may be the result of teaching and bad induction. In the case of the English poem question no. IX tests the learner's attitude towards rhyme. With the exception of one student none could even see that words such as did-seemed, air-here, route-plain do not rhyme. Nobody could express his views regarding the use of rhyme in poetry. In fact thirty five learners did not answer the question. This shows that in the case of English poetry, even the means such as rhyme are beyond the comprehension of the learners. The question of the presupposition therefore does not arise. We tried to test whether they have any preconceived notions...
about the length of the poetic lines; Here ten learners answered the question and 50% of them did not feel that there was something wrong with the changing of the length of the lines in the poem. This is the only solace which we can draw that they have presuppositions regarding the length of lines. However, it is significant to note that in the case of both these questions about 80% of the students did not answer any question about the means. In the case of the Marathi poem we tested in question no. IX (a) whether the learner expects uniformity in the syntactic pattern of the lines. Twenty-six learners answered this question and ten learners that is 38% of the learners expected uniformity. In the second question we suggested an alternative construction in uniformity with the other stanzas. Four learners out of eleven that is 36% of the learners appreciated the uniformity, 33% of the nine learners stated that there is symmetry in the syntactic pattern of the poem. This shows that about 35% of the learners are in danger of having technical presuppositions as far as Marathi poetry is concerned. Whereas in the case of English there is the problem of understanding even the poetic devices used in poetry.

x) Critical Preconceptions

Richards finally considers preconceived notions about the theory of poetry as a hindrance in appreciating it. Question no. 10 in the English questionnaire is a set of questions trying to explore critical preconceptions. Here again about thirty learners that is 75% of the learners did not answer the questions. Out of the remaining 69% of the learners considered rhyming important for poetry. In the
COMPREHENSION OF POETRY

Marathi questionnaire seventeen learners out of twenty eight, that is, 59% of the learners considered that poems are meant for singing. That is more than 50% of the learners considered poetry as a matter of rhythm and musical quality. Six students liked the English poem because it presents a visual picture or because it makes them 'sad' or because it creates an impression whereas the learners didn't like it because of its difficult construction or vocabulary or because of its theme. That is a descriptive poem like Harry Pearce is attractive only to 50% of the learners. Seven learners like reading poetry whereas only one does not like reading poetry. The reasons given also show their attitude towards poetry. They expect poetry to make them happy, to teach them values or to entertain them. In the case of the Marathi poem, fourteen, that is, 58% of the learners expect a regular pattern in poetry.

IV Observations

It is not fair to compare the results merely on the statistical findings though. The statistical findings indicate a lot. This experiment confirms the results of the earlier tests: there is not much difference in the quality of comprehension of poetry in English and Marathi. There is a slight difference only when the availability of stock responses or a free expression of personal intrusions or even the literal meanings of words is concerned. The wide use of Marathi, which is a part of the learner's experience can explain this kind of difference. But as far as the other aspects of comprehension of poetry are concerned there is no significant difference. In English about 45% of the learners...
on an average donot answer a question, whereas in Marathi the percentage is 34% that is on an average in both the languages 40% of the learners didn't answer the questions. Thus on an average 60% of the learners have answered the questions. In English 42% of these show difficulties in understanding, whereas, in Marathi the percentage is 49%. That is on an average in both the languages 46% of the learners have difficulties in comprehension. 14% of the learners on an average donot have difficulties in poetic comprehension. This is a very low percentage. It shows the quality of mind of the undergraduates and also their low sensitivity.