CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF FUNCTIONAL LITERACY IN L2 WRITING – ENGLISH IN THE INDIAN MULTI-LINGUAL CONTEXT

2.0 Introduction

English is used in the villages, towns, cities and metropolises of India. It is common knowledge that English exists as an inseparable part of the communication practices among L1, L2 users. This Chapter attempts to describe the role of English in a multi-lingual context; its "communicational reality" for the disadvantaged learners. For the learners English as L2 enables them in acquiring education and, later, social identity and career prospects. In order to understand the learner's future needs, and, his present abilities, the teacher has an important role to play. Most teachers observe their L2 literacy in terms of definitions of literacy and the presence of L1 literacy, the differences between literacy and proficiency, the nature of functional literacy in L2 and its relevance for the disadvantaged learner. A description of the L2 functional literacy among disadvantaged learners is supported by theoretical concerns from second language acquisition, language learning, cognitive studies and Cummin's (1986) BICS-CALP proposition. The significance of language literacy for bilinguals is discussed to relate it to the educational status of the disadvantaged learner. The discussion of issues in L2 writing supports the understanding of L2 functional literacy with emphasis on the survival prospects.
of learners in employment. Several perspectives on L₂ functional literacy consolidate the argument for the consideration of the disadvantaged learner’s L₂ writing abilities.

Sociologically speaking, English is an obvious presence which cuts across various sections of the Indian society. For the disadvantaged learner, L₂ learning through the formal education system should be an enabling factor. But the education system emphasizes the learning of L₂ as a system of rules. This fosters limited views of the language as something restricted to grammar and syntax. It fails to recognize the availability of the language outside the formal system, the possibility of the use of English despite the absence of structural appropriacy, and the presence of such use among a larger section of the population.

2.0.1 Language in a multilingual context

In a multilingual setting, languages exist more in the fluidity of use rather than the rigidities of usage. The possibility of the use of English gains more importance than the correctness of usage. The multilingual context in India is a rich field for the English language to feature as a literacy goal enabling learners/users belonging to different sections of society such as the urban lower middle class, the rural poor, the distant learners from semi-urban and rural hinterlands. In multilingual contexts, languages exist powerfully in
the usefulness of their literacies rather than in the perfection of the knowledge of language as a system of rules.

2.1 The changing Indian scenario

With multiple social strata in a politically democratic structure, the lower middle class and the lower classes have begun to realize their rights towards language and have started using English in a great deal. The global nature of English in a multi-lingual country serves as a link language among the various sections of society which results in several L₂ users who are literate in L₂ especially first-generation users in many families in urban and semi-urban areas. Hitherto, English was really a language used only by the educated sections of society: Today, English has spread far and wide. We hear English in the cities as well as in interior villages due to the spread of English through television and internet communications.

Given the possibility of its accessibility, a view that needs emphasis is that language be considered more a tool for communication. Roy Harris (in Love, 1990:141) says that “in human communication there is no dimension of pure statement, just as there is no dimension of pure grammaticality. By setting up such dimensions as theoretical abstractions what the theorist demonstrates is the extent to which his theorizing has lost contact with communicational reality altogether.”
English in its new appearance, as a “communicational reality” has to be meaningful to the socially backward, the oppressed and the downtrodden. Bruner (1977:9) says, “the most general objective of education is that it cultivate excellence; but it should be clear in what sense this phrase is used. It refers not only to schooling the better student but also to helping each student achieve his optimum intellectual development.” For every kind of learner, particularly the socially and economically disadvantaged, the ability to absorb the language for functional purposes is of great significance. In multilingual contexts, the world language English exists in terms of literacy or written communication, which is more fluent than in terms of a rule-governed system of language. Even in such multilingual contexts, a learner becomes disadvantaged due to several accidental occurrences.

2.2 A Profile of the socially and economically disadvantaged learner

A typical characterization of a disadvantaged learner is that he is linguistically deficient, academically unsuccessful and socially and economically backward. The disadvantaged learner is so characterized by teachers as well as the society around him because he does not measure up to their expectations in spite of emerging out of an education system, which promises academic skills and abilities. The learners actually need a longer time to learn and more opportunities to use the language. But the norm-oriented system of education treats these learners as backward and the learners
become disadvantaged in a system, which finds it difficult to accommodate the disadvantaged learner’s slow and different learning processes.

The family backgrounds of learners become important in a period of change where educational opportunities are widening. “Students from families where parents have had no education themselves have obvious difficulties in adjusting to the student’s role both in the purely scholastic sense, i.e., in the sense that his parents can give no effective guidance in his studies, as also in the psychological sense in that he finds his parents cannot serve as adult models for his own development”. (Gore et al. 1967:6)

In spite of the constant odds that he contends with, he shows the ability to learn through the use of L1. According to Edwards, (1979:50), “the environment has some formative influence upon the way a language develops. The point to be made here is that languages tend to be suited to the immediate needs of their speakers. Therefore, any consideration of language and linguistic behaviour must also involve some larger view of culture”. The L1 strength is significant vis-à-vis the number of disadvantages he is beset with in learning L2. The L1 language strength is often unrecognized and despised too because the linguistically privileged put him to further disadvantage by refusing to accept his ability to take up the challenge of language learning and language use. While attempting to improve and refine his language strengths
through schooling, which only serves middle class and upper middle class ideals of education, the learner who does not belong to either of these classes becomes disadvantaged. Schooling increases his marginalization in the guise of assimilating him into the mainstream culture and language. In his own kin-group he is a misfit, as the previous generations were unimpressed by the benefits of education or lacked the educational opportunities.

However, the disadvantaged learner does not retreat from the hostile processes of socialization. He begins to prove his language strength in small opportunities to use the L2. His academic struggle is commendable for its reliance on individual strengths amidst societal disadvantages confronting him. The disadvantaged learner actually fights against the label given to him by displaying his language strength, which, if recognized, would certainly call for radical changes in the attitudes of teachers as well as society. It may well be considered that the disadvantaged learner is enabled with a bilingual education that is a source of enrichment for the learner’s L1 and thus in effect L2, in terms of Cummins (1986) concept of “common underlying proficiency”.

2.3 The educational value of bilingualism

Bilingualism in a multilingual, multicultural society is a common feature and needs to be considered by educators and teachers for teaching
purposes, especially with reference to the socially and economically disadvantaged children in India.

Many definitions of bilingualism have a tendency to focus on speaking and listening skills. Haugen 1953, Pohl 1965, Weinreich 1953 in Cummins 1986:5 explain the concepts of horizontal bilingualism where two distinct languages have an equivalent status in the lives of speakers, vertical bilingualism or diglossia when a standard language, together with a distinct but related dialect, coexists within the same speaker, or diagonal bilingualism occurring with speakers who use a dialect with a genetically unrelated language. The three concepts give importance to speaking skills.

Haugen (1953, in Cummins 1986:6) has suggested “bilingualism is understood...to begin at the point where the speaker of one language can produce meaningful utterances in the other language”. (In all instances, the emphasis on speaker is mine). Weinreich’s (1953) Type B and Type C bilingualism were combined into compound bilingualism by Ervin and Osgood (1954) where the individual learned two languages by listening to speakers of two languages more or less interchangeably by the same people in the same situations. Lambert (1972) modified Weinreich’s Type A bilingualism and Ervain Osgood’s (1954) co-ordinate bilingualism as a second language learnt after 10 years of age. Beardsmore (1986:24) talks of early bilingualism based
on the language acquisition device of Chomsky (1956) and Lenneberg (1967) where they indicate a critical age of ± 11 years for the development of a second language. Haugen's (1956) infant bilingualism, Swain's (1972) bilingualism as a first language, Adler's (1977) ascribed bilingualism are all terms for early bilingualism. Adler (1977) talked of late or achieved bilingualism if a second language was learnt after 11 years of age. Swain (1981), Cummins (1980) talked of BICS and CALP which are significant for understanding differentiated progress rates for early and late bilinguals. While BICS refers to oral fluency, CALP refers to literacy skills.

The socially and economically disadvantaged learner can be understood through Mac Namara's (1967) definition as "those who possess at least one of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) even to a minimal degree in their second language". (in Cummins and Swain, 1986:7) Definitions of bilingualism talk of age, contexts in which the two languages have been learned or the domains in which each language is used.

With respect to the socially and economically disadvantaged children in our country, it can be said that they listen a lot to the second language in the classroom but their listening skills are not tested. Speaking is done minimally in the sense that classes are not sufficiently interactive. The teachers are also not trained to handle the language classes with a focus on developing the skills
of the learner. Learners who have shown abilities to speak and write have often been the self-motivated ones and thus easily encouraged by the teachers. The point remains as to how to motivate the mass of learners who are potentially capable of becoming bilinguals but need to be ‘pushed’ by the teachers. This is perhaps the space to be captured by the teacher to emphasize the importance of the educational value of bilingualism.

As Cummins and Swain (1986) and Cummins and Lapkin (1982) have consistently pointed out from their research findings, studies reporting positive associations have given evidence that bilingualism promotes an analytic orientation to linguistic and perceptual structures and increases sensitivity to feedback cues. The large masses of disadvantaged learners will be able to understand the cognitive advantages of bilingualism through several examples taken from L1 and their translations into L2. It is not difficult for the learners to realize that several expressions in L1 cannot be literally translated and that some expressions would not have the communication capacity of each, separate language. The disadvantaged learners too show the ability to analyse the feedback from learning with regard to certain BICS (Cummins, 1986) conventions in two languages.

As in several other languages, it will be found that the Telugu medium, vernacular learners, most of them disadvantaged, understand the differences in
expression in Telugu and English. In Telugu he bids good bye saying ‘velli vastaam’ but realizes that the same cannot be translated into English and said as “we will go and come back”. In English we say ‘good bye’. This cannot be literally translated into Telugu with the same force of expression.

Cummins (1976, 1978, 1979), Toukomaa and Skutnabb Kangas (1982) say that there may be threshold levels of linguistic competence which a bilingual child must attain both in order to avoid cognitive disadvantages and allow the potentially beneficial aspects of becoming bilingual to influence his cognitive functioning. In other words, the level of competence bilingual children achieve in their L1 may act as an intervening variable in mediating the effects of bilingual learning experiences on cognitive functioning.

This point has strong educational implications. The effects of bilingual learning experiences, it is felt, will be more often than not positive. This gives scope for the socialization process of the learner. Moreover, the confidence that is developed from learning two languages is the factor of linguistic interdependence, which results from the theory of common underlying proficiency. An ability to use two languages may have positive cognitive effects such as learners showing more interest in the subjects that they have opted to study.
Many research studies have suggested that “access to two languages in early childhood can promote children’s metalinguistic awareness and possibly broaden aspects of cognitive development. The conclusion that positive metalinguistic and cognitive consequences can result from the interaction between L1 and L2 is consistent with the notion of “common underlying proficiency” that emerges from the findings of bilingual education programmes for minority and majority language children. The interdependence of L1 and L2 development is further supported by studies of age and L2 acquisition and by investigations of bilingual language use at home” (Cummins 1986). Some of the problems occurring in bilingual education are a result of the failure to take into account the distinction between context-embedded and context-reduced language skills and the fact that academic skills in L1 and L2 are manifestations of the same underlying dimension. Context-embedded L1 and L2 speaking skills are acquired through exposure and use of the languages but L2 academic skills are relatively more dependent on the cognitive attributes of the individual. The model of attribute-based proficiency is interdependent across languages and allows the language interdependence hypothesis to be placed in a broader framework than just input based models of proficiency.

Cummins says “L2 grammatical proficiency in both context-embedded and context-reduced modes is strongly dependent on the amount and type of input received by the individual. Development of context-reduced L2
grammatical proficiency also depends significantly on attributes of the individual whereas this is not the case, to the same extent, for L2 context-embedded grammatical proficiency. Discourse and sociolinguistic proficiency on the other hand, appear less dependent on exposure to the L_2 in the environment and, in the context-reduced modes are attribute-based in that strong cross-lingual and cognitive relationships are observed” (Cummins, 1986: 212).

While exposure to L_2 and its use are gains for the bilingual learner, the cognitive variables such as individual differences at various ages and in various environments do create a lot of differences among learners. Olson (1977) talked of the text in L_2 - the written text – which needs different comprehension and production strategies than those “employed in everyday speech and which may require sustained ‘education’ for the acquisition of text processing skills”. (Cummins 1986:148). Donaldson (1978) and Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982) drew distinctions between ‘conversation’ and ‘composition’ in language emphasizing that in writing, especially in L_2, language production is a system that has to work for itself irrespective of its user.

With the understanding of the cognitive models – the sociolinguistics and sociocultural factors in the school situation according to Labov (1973), and Oller’s (1979) “global language proficiency”, Olson’s (1977) distinction
between utterance and text, Donaldson’s distinguishing definition of embedded and disembedded thought and language and differences between conversation and composition by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982) it can be observed that literacy is a recurring outcome as an educational value of bilingualism.

In the Indian multilingual context, for the socially and economically disadvantaged learner, English is the language that he needs to learn to speak and write. However, L1 instruction helps him perhaps only to communicate, converse and utter in embedded contexts of familiarity. The home environment may not be helpful in improving his L1 literacy skills because of low socioeconomic status. Therefore, L1 is not rich enough to provide a comfortable starting point for him to begin his L2 literacy. Therefore, the onus falls on the social system with its educational institutions to maintain bilingualism to enrich his L1 and enable him to gain proficiency in L2.

In a sense, bilingual education should provide the socially and economically disadvantaged learner a sound two-language base. This makes him cognitively capable of assimilating knowledge across the curriculum with the help of literacy skills developed within bilingual educational programmes from an early stage of schooling to the level of undergraduation. The value of bilingual education would then be not just language maintenance but providing a social environment integrating all sections of learners as shareholders for
upholding the great task of language maintenance. As languages are learnt more and more, the value that is realized in the long run is also one of absorption and assimilation of cultures by the marginalized and deprived. Bilingual education is a way of bringing the disadvantaged learners into the mainstream curriculum through graded stages of proficiency with literacy in both languages as a modest goal. One major educational implication of the threshold hypothesis is that if the optimal development of minority language children's academic cognitive potential is a goal, then the school programme must aim to promote an additive form of bilingualism (Cummins 1979). Attainment of this goal will necessarily involve a home school language switch at some stage in the educational process, but when and how must be determined in relation to the linguistic and socioeconomic characteristics of the learner and of the learning environment (Swain 1978).

The point of difference with Cummins arises when he says that home language is different from school languages and that home language tends to be denigrated by others. In the Indian context, the home language is different from school language but (emphasis mine) home language is widely used and accepted in the school environment among learners as well as teachers. School language means language for examination purposes. Home language is also used in the school extensively. L1 and L2 are used together a great deal.
Several other reasons may be found which do not help in the understanding of the profile of the disadvantaged learner. A great deal of literature focuses on certain variables like teaching methods curriculum renewal, parent education, teacher education, intervention programmes, extended learning hours, remedial and bridge courses for the academic success of the disadvantaged learner. However, the first generation learner carries with him the intangible weight of a non-academic culture. On the other hand, visible statistics of academic, success rates and ratios of the advantaged learners create an oppressive environment for the disadvantaged learner.

2.4 The teacher and the disadvantaged learner

Though most readings in the literature characterize the disadvantaged learner as coming from a social and economic milieu which make him so, it is within the ability of the teacher to see and sift what are the existing, desirable characteristics in a learner which will help him change his status. The teachers in a school who are part of the community should be able to impart "... an education that teaches him how to learn, that gives him the intellectual discipline and depth of understanding that will enable him to meet the new conditions as they arise" (Silberman in Passow 1967:14). A community of effective teachers will be able to analyse the factors of disadvantage and enable the school to take on a wide range of functions that lie beyond the normal sphere of schools. Hunt says that institutional settings need to be arranged
where learners “can be supplied with a set of encounters with circumstances which will provide an antidote for what they have missed” (Passow 1967:202). According to Kenji Hakuta (1986:229-230), “the goals of the educational system could be seen as the development of all students as functional bilinguals, including monolingual English speakers. The motive is linguistic, cognitive, and cultural enrichment – the creation of citizens of the world”.

The term disadvantaged is accurate to the extent that it describes the socioeconomic background of the learner. The family environment does not enable his individual and social need to learn L2 in terms of resources such as money to buy books or attend special courses. Nobody at home or in the neighbourhood contributes to interaction in L2. Nor are there reading resources available in the neighbourhood. The family and the neighbourhood may not be supporting his efforts in improving L2. The poor environment of L2 oracy and literacy are the triggering factors for the disadvantaged learner to concentrate on building his individual effort in acquiring L2 literacy as a social and individual need.

To use the term ‘disadvantaged’ to describe his learning difficulties is a dishonour to the teaching profession. Language teaching should own ever greater responsibility for accommodating the learner into learning situations and learning experiences rather than labelling him with the term
‘disadvantaged’ which serves to conveniently separate economic classes and adopt a stance of sympathy and patronizing support. For the working class child there seems to be a lack of progressive development towards “verbalizing and making explicit, subjective intent” (Bernstein in Passow 1967:231) but it is not the result of deficiency of intelligence “but comes about as a consequence of the social relationship acting through the linguistic medium” (ibid:231). The language teacher specifically needs to become a critical educator in order to learn “the collective and communicative practices associated with particular uses of both written and spoken forms among specific social groups” (Giroux 1989: 143).

The disadvantaged learner’s background knowledge of his culture, his attitude towards literacy resulting in an effort to become literate, his need to improve L2 writing and the motivation to learn, already help him in not being disadvantaged. These strengths need to be identified and properly valued. By understanding the remediability of situations such as the strengths of the learner, the educators can help the learner come out of his disadvantages. By recognizing his exercise of right to education, the learner has already removed himself from disadvantage. The learner finds himself in “a struggle beyond the language itself to engage with broader battles around culture, knowledge and inequality” (Pennycook 1994:269).
The disadvantaged learner is irrelevantly placed in an unwise measurement of educational output which is a replica of the economic system that responds “optimally, in quantity and quality, at the minimum cost, to the technical demand for training” (Bourdieu 1990:181). This training could help the explorers of language – the disadvantaged learners – in writing in L2 with acceptable legibility, which is a skill attainable by most people (Oxenham 1980:21). Writing which has an awareness of the language in which it is written can be called as literacy.

2.5 What is literacy

It may be useful to consider literacy as a consequence of schooling, which could also mean the identification of language abilities among disadvantaged learners. It is on the basis of language being used as a tool for communication that learners get integrated into a system. It is a broad view of language, which encompasses communication, competence, proficiency, and grammaticality in the written mode. It is seen to be accommodating the versatile, voracious reader as well as the disadvantaged learner with poor reading resources. It is a recognition of the political, socioeconomic right of every individual to seek education and language rights under the basic fundamental right to education. It seeks to bring equality and justice for all sections of society to enjoy the privileges of education. O’Brien et al (2001: xv) say that “when we discuss constructions of literacy, we are referring to the
ways people generate and bring practices of literacy to particular events of reading, writing, speaking and listening, particularities that are shaped at least in part by the context of the secondary school and by adolescence as a period of development or as a way of being and knowing the world”.

Elsewhere, O’Brien quotes Hooks (1994:37) who “took a relational, embodied stance on pedagogy, arguing that teachers must consider the knowledge that their students bring to the classroom, take risks with their students (as opposed to encouraging their students to take risks while they watch from some safe place) and become involved in the process of learning with students”.

With reference to the present study, a concept of literacy would be that learners display eagerness to use L2 in writing at the tertiary level though such writing may be at the BICS (Cummins, 1986) level. At the tertiary level, the threshold competence may be inadequate. But literacy in L2 is beset with complexities in a multilingual, multicultural setting. The complexity of the issue of literacy in L2 needs to be recognized and appreciated by norm-supporters who may be teachers. Recognition or identification of L2 literacy among the socially and economically disadvantaged learners is a matter of human rights, human concern and values, which point to the accomplishment of larger educational goals.
2.5.1 Literacy and proficiency

Literacy and proficiency are language related terms. Literacy gives a pervasive view of language. It is an inclusive, non-discriminating term, which presents the availability of language to a large number of learners. Conceptually, it is a difficult term that is not amenable to measurement but attempts to reduce the gap between the fluent language users and learners of language on a continuum of language learning.

Proficiency is a term used in schooling and education as an evaluative term. It often results in the division, exclusion, marginalization of learners. It is a way of labelling. It is form and structure oriented, amenable to standardized tests and normative judgments. It may be observed that proficiency creates good language users but literacy creates a community of learners across the sections of society. The disadvantaged learners pursue the learning of L2 through flexible, socio-educational, democratic processes which help them in survival. A part of the survival struggle is improving one's ability to use L2. Literacy is therefore a more 'freedom-seeking egalitarian term. Proficiency, on the other hand, could, perhaps be constraining influence making the learners feel oppressed with the rigours of an unfeeling system. In a multi-lingual context, among various users of L2, proficiency is a more individual-based goal while literacy is a community-based goal.
2.6 Literacy in L₂

It may be suggested that literacy in L2 is a bilingual phenomenon. It is a concept, which balances additive bilingualism and language maintenance issues. It is a conscious choice made by the individual regarding the opportunity or necessity for L2 use. It leaves the individual with greater choice to use his L1 in most situations of language production/use. It demands writing in L2 when there is an external compulsion. At that time, learners do not retreat from writing in L₂ because it shows evidence of L2 knowledge. They include themselves in the larger multi-lingual context by writing in a second language which effects communication.

2.6.1 Nature of L₂ literacy

L2 in a multilingual context is acquired more as a social tool meant for communication. L2 writing is also used as a tool for communication. But the conventions of writing make claims for grammaticality and syntax. If too much of grammatical focus is insisted upon, then is language only a formal structure? If grammatical focus is absent or minimally present, is there no communication made? The response to these questions may not be a clear ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. It may be said that L₂ literacy is inclined towards communication. Usage is a matter of future need for the learners. The disadvantaged learner’s linguistic system is able to understand language without proper linguistic forms. Communication apparently occurs because of
shared meanings through content words such as nouns and verbs. The shared meanings, in shared contexts make the disadvantaged learner’s literacy workable or functional for most day-to-day L2 writing situations. In most local contexts, the disadvantaged learners’ L2 writing is recognizable and meaningful because of the particular functions that words have as well as the larger nature of shared contexts of L2 language use.

2.6.2 Functional literacy in L2

Functional literacy in L2 is a way of recognizing the socioeconomic background of a user, his background knowledge of the world, his attempts to integrate into dominant or mainstream culture. It is an evolving, gradual process of many first generation learners socializing into the modern world through the support of educational rights and institutions with different perspectives on curriculum.

Cairns (1977) points out that the meaningfulness of the concept of functional literacy needs to be looked at with care. He supports the Canadian Association of Adult Education’s definition of functional literacy in terms of the completion of nine years of formal schooling but also adds that the definition does not “take into account individual differences in literacy needs or use of literacy skills; nor does it consider the informal and non-informal learning acquired throughout life” (Cairns, 1977:44 in Castell et al 1986:8).
Solomon believes that everyone needs “the ability to read and write, the nuts-and-bolts part of literacy – the skills that everyone in this society must learn if they are to have any possible chance at decent jobs, fair treatment and protection. This is ‘functional’ literacy. It has to do with being able to read a simple contract. It has to do with being able to write a letter of application, or read a warning label or advertisement. Its practical importance is unquestionable and therefore, usually unquestioned” (Castell et al 1968:41). De Castell and Allan Luke say that “educational science would provide both the means and ends of education; a body of universally applicable skills of reading and writing, transferable to a variety of social and vocational contexts” (ibid).

With the social theories propounded by Berger and Luckmann, Basil Bernstein and Michael Halliday, the significance of language in structuring and maintaining social life assumed importance since the 1960s. Misson et al. (1998:7) say that “literacy is important because it provides an educated workforce who can further the economic goals of the nation.” Teachers who are part of the social life “often see themselves as trying to give all students access to the kinds of language and literacy that are the instruments of power, thereby enabling the less fortunate to overcome their disadvantage and achieve success” (ibid).
For the disadvantaged learner, "the writing classroom takes the form of a workshop, in which students choose the materials, tools and end product and work together in the crafting. It is founded on a theory of learning by self-directed activity and discovery, by active involvement and initiative in all aspects of the process, by feedback and self and peer-evaluation. The teacher's role in this is indirect, a mostly invisible 'facilitation' of that learning. The self that emerges is a creative individual with a personal voice and a child's freshness of vision still. By playacting what 'real' writers do in the writing process, they too in turn may become real authors" (Morgan 1977:61). Olson (1993:15) says that "what is critical is understanding what a script represents and what it fails to represent".

In Gray's landmark book, The Teaching of Reading and Writing, published by UNESCO in 1956, attention is drawn to the need to make literacy appropriate to its natural setting. "The notion of functional literacy takes a useful first step forward in going beyond a fixed set of skills. It does this by taking account of the fact that the demands of particular situations are different and that being literate is a relative matter, relative to the contexts in which it is used" (Barton 1994:193). It is also useful to consider Levine's (1986:43) view that "functional literacy can be defined as the possession of, or access to, the competencies and information required to accomplish transactions entailing reading and writing which an individual wishes - or is compelled - to engage".
If functional literacy can be considered as fluency in writing then Levine (ibid:46) says that it is “socially consequential, therefore, it reflects social distribution of knowledge”. Carrying the concept of fluency in writing a little further, it may be observed that Scinto (1986:17) says “careful distinctions between oral and written language are in general not made unless research is particularly focused on such topics, as is sometimes done in neurolinguistic research on agraphia”. If the concept of fluency in writing may be looked at as useful for the disadvantaged learner, then, it remains to be seen how functional literacy in L2 at the tertiary level is a possible instance of L2 use.

2.6.3 L2 functional literacy at the tertiary level for the disadvantaged learner

The tertiary level of education is considered to be the gateway to economic and social opportunities. In a bilingual/multilingual context, the tertiary level of education is much sought after because of the benefits of L2 literacy. With several seemingly democratic measures adopted in the effort to reach education to all sections of society, the socially and economically disadvantaged learner who is also quite often the first generation learner, finds himself as the beneficiary of tertiary level education. Getting into the mainstream or formal education system removes him from his disadvantage. The learner is disadvantaged in a new way in that the existing system of
certification fails to reflect his language strengths, his efforts in language learning and the potential he has for future learning.

The disadvantaged learner is a creation of the formal education system, which has no procedure to appreciate his literacy. While the learner is making efforts to grapple with L2 because of his "common underlying proficiency" (Cummins 1986), the evaluation and certification are normative and fail the learner in the sense that his capacity to prove his common underlying proficiency is unaccounted for. The capacity for literacy in L2 or the evidence of a common underlying proficiency in a formal mass education system in a bilingual context can be seen among the learners as they cope with the demands of the L2 task by concentrating on the meaning potential in communication. (see Chapter IV) The background knowledge of the learner, his reading of the world, his strategies for learning, his instrumental motivation, have helped and increased in him the ability to write in L2. (see Chapter IV and Appendices I to IX)

It is in the nature of a young, growing learner to focus on such skills that will beget him social and economic opportunities and therefore functional literacy is his aim. He tries to work for literacy that helps him to a large extent. He attempts to concentrate selectively on what is really essential for him. In a bilingual situation, it can be considered fair that the disadvantaged learner is
exercising his basic human right to education and is also serving the purpose of maintaining bilingualism by exercising his choice to recognize the need and limits of his requirements for working in L2.

Another important issue, which needs to be recognized is that the bilingual learner is able to listen and speak more in L1. He is able to read and write in L2 without a strong L2 linguistic environment. While the necessity of listening and speaking in L2 is minimal, the need for reading and writing in L2 appears to be more. This necessity arises due to many factors. That is, the social mobility and economic opportunities demand the knowledge of English and the education system necessitates the knowledge of English in order to preserve the right to education in a modern, technological, global world where the link language is English. Tertiary level education obviates the need for a knowledge of English because it is the gateway to opportunities.

In spite of the constraints of the learners' background, his environment, the present education system, the formal education system is a continuous, stable transaction between the teacher and learner. Within the consistency of this transaction, the teacher emerges as a greater resource for the learner in terms of the significance and consequence of the learner's use of L2. The teacher, however, being part of the rigidity in the education system becomes helpless in terms of evaluation, which follows a different pattern than testing
the language strength of the learner. Within the transaction of learning and teaching, quite often the teacher is able to gauge the L₂ literacy of a bilingual, disadvantaged learner who is disadvantaged because of the unchanging evaluation system.

The L₂ literacy of the learner captures his ability to read meaning in the world and express it in L₂ without the support of a listening environment and a speech community. His L₂ literacy makes him a user of language and a struggling bilingual attempting to reach the norms of L₂ in spite of the disadvantages he faces because he is in a rigid system. The existing L₂ literacy level may appear to be functional as it helps him to be in the mainstream of L₂ language use and allows him to improve for greater control over language.

It is important to note that in bilingual contexts, there is greater choice for the individual to use language in different situations; the learner recognizes the need for sharper focus on the use of language. Educational theory suggests that learning continues throughout one’s lifetime, and languages are learnt to fulfill needs at different points of time in different places.
2.6.4 The relevance of L₂ functional literacy for the disadvantaged learner

Functional literacy in L₂ for the socially and economically disadvantaged learner is a process, which puts him on the road to advantage. By using L₂, the learner exercises his right to use a language, to struggle for occupational opportunity, to improve his socioeconomic status. By insisting on structure, patterns and norms in language use the socially and economically disadvantaged learner's linguistic effort is not acknowledged. A restriction of educational and occupational opportunity purely on a narrow vision of language denies equity and justice in society.

According to Jim Cummin's interdependence of language hypothesis, there is a common underlying proficiency in any language user. This is evident in a bilingual situation. L₁, the home language may be widely used in all communicative situations but writing in L₂ may be insisted upon in workplaces. To examine the adequacy of communication in L₂ writing, translation tasks help in determining the extent to which such communication can be captured and the lexical, semantic and syntactic processes that are involved in translation. An overall adequate communication output in writing situations in L₂ can be termed as functional literacy. Such literacy corresponds semantically to L₁ and is in the process of acquisition of lexical and syntactic
accuracy in L₂. Therefore, an overall adequate communication output in writing situations in L₂ can be termed as functional literacy.

L₂ literacy is a learning state in which the learner struggles to write in spite of many difficulties. The difficulties can be in the nature of limited learning time for L₂ writing, limited uses of L₂ writing in out-of-school contexts, almost a non-occurrence of L₂ writing in the family background. The courage to write stems from a critical understanding of the dominant language practices in society. It presents an honest effort in written language use on the part of the learner who stands bravely through the difficult learning stages. To attempt writing in L₂ shows "instrumental motivation" which is a positive attitude in the disadvantaged learner. If individual differences are seriously treated as the learning push-buttons, motivation and attitude emerge as strong forces in a bilingual learner. L₂ literacy as a learning state is an essentially small and firm step in the learner's determination to use L₂. Between an anxiety-ridden state of not being able to use L₂ in a grammatically acceptable way and the instrumental factor of the desire to acquire L₂ for social and occupational mobility, the learner comes to a transient state of functional literacy in L₂. It is therefore characteristic of a disadvantaged learner's eager search for a place in the dominant practices of society. His present inability to use language accurately is not a deterrent.
Apparent deterring factors actually increase the motivation level. Timidity in speaking L₂ is actually overcome by writing in L₂. Functional literacy in L₂ actually gives the learner sufficient courage to present the developmental state of his learning to the reader/teacher. In bilingual situations, where speaking in L₂ is unimportant, functional literacy in L₂ is an advantageous position for the learner to move forward in the continuum of learning a language.

Accounting for the language strengths of the socially and economically disadvantaged learners as ‘functional literacy’ is like “a good educational practice (which) requires facilitators to build upon what learners bring to class, to listen and not just deliver, and to respond to local articulations of ‘need’ as well as make their own ‘outsider’ judgments of it” (Street, 2001:14).

Learners, coming from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds in bilingual contexts, bring into the tertiary level classroom a rich repertoire of background knowledge of the difficulty of learning L₂, English, a surprising metalinguistic awareness of L₂, an active desire to improve their use of L₂, and, “individual differences” (Skehan, 1982) converging markedly towards instrumental motivation. Apparently, English as L₂ is at the same level of fluency whether in speech or in writing. The L₂ speech and L₂ writing
are almost similar. While the uses of English in speech contexts are relatively fewer, the demands made on writing in English are wider.

The disadvantaged learner is quite often a first generation learner with both parents or one parent not having attended the formal education system. He lives in a cultural environment, which places a lot of importance on the local norms of the use of his L1. His reading habits are severely constrained by the absence of books, magazines, newspapers even in L1. But the regional medium of instruction helps him in gaining literacy in L1. Reading habits in L2 are impossible because the economic backwardness at home treats any investment in L2 literacy as a luxury.

Most of the communication needs of the learner’s life up to the age of 16 or 17 are met by L1. The learners look at L2 as an academic subject until they reach the tertiary level. At the tertiary level, when the learner is about 18 years of age, greater importance is placed on the need to write in English to pass on undergraduate course and later an entrance examination. The skill of speaking is largely ignored because L1 fulfils the learner’s spoken language situations. The skill of writing, per se, is not taken care of by the curriculum and the large classes of disadvantaged learners constrain the L2 writing hour in the classrooms. The syllabus does not focus on the development of writing skills in terms of assessment. Out of 100 marks, 60 marks are allotted for the
study of texts. 40 marks are allotted for composition. A student can get a passing grade without attempting the composition section. The answers for the prescribed texts are available in guides, which the student learns by rote and manages to score 50-55 marks effortlessly.

Most often the learner does not get individual attention from the teacher. Redeeming methods such as peer teaching and group work are alien methods that are alien to the teacher in a rigid education system. Therefore, the learner is disadvantaged because the teaching techniques are not renewed or reconsidered.

2.7 The disadvantaged learner’s need for L2

The learner does not use English for purposes of speaking the learner uses English more for purposes of writing. In the formal education system, English is the first language. But it is not the medium of instruction. At the end of the year, the learner writes a 3-hour content-based examination in English. The examination provides him with minimum or average marks and a certificate is issued which establishes the learner as successful in the courses that he studied. When the learner takes up employment, he realizes that the English which helped him to pass the examination does not help him to stand as a user of English. The certificate is eloquently silent about the efforts of the learner in using English. The learner faces a conflicting situation in the society.
outside the education system. He has a certificate which says that he has passed in the English language but the society finds him incompetent to handle all the written situations of communication. This status of the learner with a pass certificate from the university but almost a no-entry board into employment because of lack of proficiency ignores the learner’s ability to use the language. Society condemns him to be and remain the disadvantaged.

2.8 The reality of certification for the disadvantaged learner

After passing through a course of study, the certificate given to the disadvantaged learner does not fully reflect the strengths of each individual but only provides mass assessment. The job market sanctifies the certificate as an equivalent to fluent and grammatical use of L₂ for all desirable purposes of communication.

For the disadvantaged learner, certification is more an obstruction rather than help. The perpetual struggle for an academic qualification in the class and through the course of graduation do not help the learner to set himself for life because the certification does not reflect this struggle.

The certificate is an obstruction because it does not reflect the live situation where the learners develop the L₂ language strength gradually. The certificate becomes a non-negotiable proof of some expected norm to be
fulfilled by means of an educational system with an apparent foolproof assessment procedure which somehow seems capable of satisfying the norms in language expected by society but fails to reveal the real strengths of the learners. This certification obscures the ability of the learners to use the language as well as the teachers’ efforts to understand the attempt of the learner to use the language. Certification causes further disadvantage to the disadvantaged learners. The certificate does not reflect the struggle of the learner to use $L_2$. On the other hand, it shows him to be inadequate in $L_2$ use or not proficient. It overlooks and ignores the disadvantage learner’s $L_2$ abilities as functional literacy. Thus, certification does not validate what the disadvantaged learner actually has, that is features of literacy which help him in the production of language as a tool for communication.

2.9 Description of $L_2$ functional literacy among disadvantaged learners

The disadvantaged learner’s $L_2$ writing has features of functional literacy, which may not conform to the norms of a literate person that society acknowledges. Some distinct features of this functional literacy may be listed

1. His writing may not be form-focused.

2. Conventions of writing like use of capital letters, punctuation are not always followed.

3. Only some coherence is found.

4. Sometimes sentences are loosely connected.
5. He is able to use the second language in small, connected texts like paragraphs.

6. Through the second language he is able to communicate a message.

These features of functional literacy in L2 are missed in the process of certification. On the other hand, society defines these features as the missing "cognitive academic language proficiency" (Cummins, 1986). Literacy, a positive feature of education among disadvantaged learners thus remains largely ignored.

If education stands for social justice, empowerment of the individual and social upliftment, the disadvantaged learners are, therefore, in higher institutions of learning but certification should not deprive them of the social and economic goals of education. If literacy can be considered as an aspect of schooling, then "literacy and schooling ... transform the users ... indispensable to socioeconomic development" (Oxenham 1980:17, in Street 1984:186). The disadvantaged learner attempts to use language in his own way, without all the conventions, only trying to project his real experiences with language, which may be ungrammatical but meaningful. It is necessary to understand that progressive, linear model of development in the acquisition of language structures and uses cannot fully account for culturally different ways of acquiring knowledge. Several perspectives from theories of second language
acquisition have shown that a linear model of language development does not
help to include large numbers of disadvantaged learners.

2.10 Second language acquisition and functional literacy

Perspectives from theories of second language acquisition have helped
in the understanding of the fact that L₂ language structures cannot be learnt in a
sequential manner. Therefore, the review which follows helps in recognising
the potential of literacy in the disadvantaged learner. Language wise or in
terms of language use, L₂, he is certainly not 'disadvantaged'. Some of the
SLA theories which have helped in understanding the disadvantaged learner’s
problems in L₂ use are discussed below. In the theories of Roger Anderson
developmental stages, Larry Selinker (1982) inter-language, Vivian Cook
(1991) and Karmiloff Smith (1986) implicit to explicit acquisition of linguistic
skills, Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada (1993) study of how languages are
learned, the basis for the study of functional literacy may be found.

A review of the perspectives from theories of second language
acquisition help in greater understanding of the fact that language structures
cannot be learnt as a linear sequence. Therefore, the review helps in
understanding the literacy potential of the disadvantaged learner. It also
becomes necessary to understand that in terms of L₂ language use, he is certainly not ‘disadvantaged’.

Roger Andersen expatiating on the cognitive operating principles that govern the path the learner takes in developing an increasingly more native-like and more efficient and successful linguistic competence in a second language discusses the transfer to somewhere principle. This principle indicates that a grammatical form or structure will occur consistently to a large extent in the “interlanguage” (Selinker, 1972) of the learner if the natural acquisitional principles are consistent with the L₁ structure. Further, in the transfer principle preference is given to ‘free’, ‘invariant’, “functionally simple morphemes which are congruent with the L₁ and L₂” (Andersen 1983:182, in Pattern et al 1990:61). This transfer to somewhere principle shows that it will be difficult to say that a learner’s second language in the status of interlanguage can be called ungrammatical.

Mitchell and Myles (1998) say that “though learners’ L₂ utterances may be deviant by comparison with target language norms, they are by no means lacking in system. Errors and mistakes are patterned, and though some regular errors are due to the influence of the first language, this is by no means true of all of them, or even a majority of them. Instead, there is a good deal of evidence that learners work their way through a number of developmental
stages, from very primitive and deviant versions of the L₂, to progressively more elaborate and target-like versions. Just like fully proficient users of a language, their language production can be described by a set of underlying rules, these interim rules have their own integrity and are not just inadequately applied versions of the TL rules.”

In the words of Vivian Cook (1991:7), “however peculiar and limited they may be, learners’ own language systems, their speech shows rules and patterns of its own. At each stage learners have their own language systems. The nature of these learner systems may be very different from that of the target language while they are idiosyncratic and constantly changing, they are nonetheless systematic.” The starting point for L₂ learning research is the learner’s own language system christened interlanguage by Larry Selinker (1972). Learners are not wilfully distorting the native system; they are inventing a system of their own.” Spelling errors may occur in the learners’ L₂ writing, but the lexical choice is correct. The wrong use of preposition ‘on’ when ‘at’ has to be used is a point of difference from the target language norm. The use of wrong preposition differs from native speaker’s use. The sentence “So I am early year 1ˢᵗ January bought of some greetings” means “So I bought some greetings early in the year on 1ˢᵗ January”. The learner does not use ‘I is’ or ‘I are’. The use of ‘I am’ is correct but in the whole sentence ‘I am’ is an instance of the learner inventing a system of his own.
Elsewhere, Vivian Cook (1999:194-915) says that “grammar that differs from native speakers’ pronunciation that betrays where L2 users come from, and vocabulary that differs from native usage are treated as signs of L2 users’ failure to become native speakers, not of their accomplishments in learning to use the L2.”

Even according to processability theory, “the task of acquiring a language includes the acquisition of the procedural skills needed for the processing of the language,” (Pienemann 1998) but, however, the procedures in the acquisition of L1 and L2 may not be similarly characterized. There is a difference in the procedures that underlie the production of morphosyntactic structures and the rules of grammar that are consciously learned. Bialystok (1991) and Karmiloff-Smith (1986) also assume that the acquisition of linguistic skills moves from ‘implicit’ to ‘explicit’ and that explicit linguistic knowledge does not have to be conscious (Pienemann 1998:40-41). For the disadvantaged learner, the implicit knowledge of language structures of L1 help him in understanding the grammar rules of L2. This learning does not really require conscious learning of the grammatical rules of L2. But production of L2 is evident which helps in using the word functional literacy because he is able to use the language to convey meaningful messages for which grammaticality is not important. Pienemann’s ‘teachability’ hypothesis also has a two-dimensional aspect consisting of the ‘developmental’ dimension and
the ‘variational dimension’, along which learners are essentially located according to their degree of linguistic norm-orientedness, as evidenced by percentages of production of redundant items or structures within the developmental processing capacities of the learner.” (Pienemann 1998:48). This perspective renews the view that the disadvantaged learner is on the continuum of the norm and, therefore, the society’s denial of his capacity to use English, L2, is equal to showing injustice to the learner and treating him as disadvantaged.

Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada (1993) argue about the conditions for language learning when they say that “there is little pressure to perform at high levels of accuracy, and there is often a greater emphasis on comprehension than on production in the early stages of learning...modified input...and the teacher in these classes makes every effort to speak to students in a level of language they can understand. In addition, other students speak a simplified language,” Lightbown and Spada’s argument with reference to the lesser emphasis on language production may not be completely agreeable. The teacher may not emphasize production, especially written, because the teacher may believe in upholding a norm. But the learner gives importance to production, which could be meaningful to the teacher. As much as a reflective teacher does not demand high levels of accuracy in language production in a L2 situation, the normal teacher contradictorily expects a lot of grammaticality
and accuracy in writing as she is supposed to uphold the norm in the business of teaching. Sometimes, the society expects it more than the teacher. Thus, the teacher’s efforts to understand the learner’s strengths in using language and the learner’s efforts to use the language are obscured by certification. Certification does not reflect the disadvantaged learner’s attempts to use L₂. Society does not seem to realize that “language is always something that is actively constructed in a context, physically present or imagined, by both speaker/writer and hearer/reader through a complex process of inferencing that is guided by, but never fully determined by, the structural properties of the language” (Brian Street 1997:51).

The learning situation is another angle which is not reflected in the certificate and the society is the loser because no attempts have been made for social reconstruction by bringing the disadvantaged groups of learners into the language learning continuum. Society expects products but ignores the human processes of learning. If L₂ writing, characterized as functional literacy is an educational experience then “the value of an educational experience is judged by reference not to the supposed value of the knowledge-content involved but to its effectiveness in supporting continuous development” (Kelly 1987:18). L₂ functional literacy could be a way of supporting L₂ development among different groups of learners who are in need for L₂ at different points of time in their lives.
2.11 Perspectives from theories of language learning

In India, it is the non-native English speaking speech community consisting of educated Indians which serves as a reference group for the learner of English. The first generation learner’s immediate objective of learning English is occupational and social mobility. Margie Berns (Patten et al 1990) says that “not every learner will need the range of skills or level of proficiency to fulfil all roles”. While realizing that the learner needs to improve upon his present status as a language user, Berns’ observation helps us in the initial step to understand the abilities of the learner who will certainly use L2 for more purposes during his lifetime. Claire J. Kramsch expands on the concept of language elaborately when he says that emphasis on skills detracts us from the global concern with communication. Foreign language learning research must consider language in its “total expressive and communicative thrust”, that language is “quintessentially indeterminate and culturally relative” (Kramsch in Patten et al 1990). Kramsch’s views are valuable because a language used in international contexts pays greater attention to cultural uses of words and negotiation of meanings is possible between interlocutors. The disadvantaged learner is in a position to use English because he can be understood as long as the educated minority upholding a single norm does not condemn him to be an inefficient user of English.
The indeterminate quality of language is an important factor to consider in the use of a language according to Antonella Sorace. Linguistic intuitions, she feels, need to be valued especially with "second language learners' intuitions as they often have a metalinguistic as well as an interlanguage norm available, or with respect to bilingual/multilingual communities, in which more than one grammar (associated with varying degrees of prestige) usually co-exist in speakers' competence" (Sorace in Paukhurst et al 1998:172-173). It is important to recognize that the disadvantaged learner performs a language task in writing by putting to use metalinguistic and interlanguage norms and still achieving meaning. Vivian Cook also explicitly states, "at each stage learners have their own language systems; their speech show rules and patterns of its own. At each stage learners have their own language systems. The nature of these learner systems may be different from that of the target language...they are nonetheless systematic" (1991:7).

The complex processes of language learning can be further understood in the work on cognitive studies, which also helps in greater appreciation of the disadvantaged learner's efforts.

2.12 The importance of cognitive studies

Cognitive studies by Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner (Karen Pine in Messer et al, 1999) respectively argue centrally for the importance of the
development of more general, underlying cognitive strengths such as the relevant notion of the 'zone of proximal development' and the notions of 'scaffolding' and 'handover' by which learners gradually come to take control of the learning process.

According to Piaget, knowing is a process rather than a product. If this is so, then the emphasis in education must be on the subject of that process, the child, his growth and development, not on the knowledge or skills in which he is to be instructed or trained. (in Kelly, 1987:135).

Bruner says that learners "actually seek out the rules of language for themselves, clear evidence of the process of intellectual structuring and restructuring in the attempt to make sense of experience. This is why children make those common 'mistakes' in English grammar – 'I taked' for 'I took', 'mouses' for 'mice', etc. They are seeking to identify rules of syntax and grammar and to apply them". (in Kelly, 1987:138).

Vygotsky (1962) says that "success in learning a foreign language is contingent on a certain degree of maturity in the native language. The child can transfer to the new language the system of meanings he already possesses in his own...learns to see his language as one particular system among many,
to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations.”

Goodman and Goodman (1990) quote Halliday’s (1975) use of the phrase “learning how to mean”. Language is used to learn and learning the language also occurs simultaneously. “Thinking that we can teach the forms of language as prerequisites to their use is a mistake schools often make.” (in Moll: 1990:231).

If the disadvantaged learner is able to prove that he can learn L₂ because he has the L₁ system, then, the cognitive development of a human being is a universal feature. Therefore, he is not a disadvantaged learner in terms of language learning and language use. Society, certificate, therefore, has no right to condemn his efforts to use language.

Pattanayak, D.P. (1981:64) says that “a standard language and a certified education intrude into the autonomy of small groups without providing them with protective devices for the maintenance of their culture.”

It can be said that in a multilingual situation, the emphasis is more on language as communication and that language is used according to specific communication needs. Writing is used for the purposes of fulfilling
communication. If writing is used without emphasis on formality, it may be understood as functional literacy. Such recognition helps in understanding the multi-voicedness of the users of language. The different views on the nature of L₂ writing or written communication are a notable feature in multilingual contexts where L₂ writing is used for several communication purposes. Some of the views are discussed in the following section.

2.13 Some views of L₂ learning in multi-lingual contexts

With regard to the notions from theories of language teaching, second language acquisition and cognitive studies as the baseline for language education for the disadvantaged learner especially, it is useful to consider Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s words that “India is obliged to target diverse, even conflictual, and largely unarticulated goals. If what is taught in the university is too solipsistic to be counted as ‘knowledge’, it is at the same time not purposive enough to serve as a skill” (Agnihotri 1995). One of the unarticulated goals of language education is L₂ literacy in a formal educational system. Agnihotri and Khanna (1997:30) rightly observe “it is unfortunate that in spite of a long series of committees, study groups and commissions, we have not been able to redefine the space called ‘English’ according to our own sociolinguistic reality.” In our multi-cultural, multi-lingual context where knowledge of more than one language and a functional use of two or three
languages help people within the country, then English may occupy the space for functional literacy.

Grosjean (1982) and Paradis (1977) have been observed by Agnihotri (1998) and he says that the equality of status between a monolingual and a bilingual needs to be recognized in terms of the fact that they are not different species and at the same time the norms established for monolinguals may not help bilingual behaviour.

2.14 Language literacy for bilinguals

Cook-Gumperz (Koul 1994:51) with his idea of literacy as pluralistic, offers an insight into the language and literacy aspects of education in India. The Government of India report (Government of India, 1998: 5 in Koul, 1994:59) on literacy points out that “promotion of literacy in India has been identified as one of the national missions because, literacy is “an essential tool for communication and learning, for acquiring and sharing of knowledge and information, a precondition for an individual’s evaluation and growth and for national development”. Gudschinsky’s concept of literacy as the ability to read what one can write and write what one can speak and Goddard’s view that literacy is the ability to express oneself intelligently and adequately through written and spoken mediums are the important aspects of L2 education in India especially with the disadvantaged learners. (Rao in Gupta et al, 1998:198)
Foley looking at classroom discourse both oral and written states that "instructional scaffolding ... sees learning as a process of gradual internalisation of routines and procedures available to the learner from the social and cultural context in which the learning takes place." (in Tickoo 1994:142). He further adds that "learners are moving from the world of commonsense knowledge which is typically spoken into the world of educational knowledge which is typically written down. It is this distinction that plays a significant part in shaping the social system and defining the individual's access to, and participation in social processes" (ibid:143). Moreover, according to Gary M Jones, in the bilingual education system the acquisition of fluency (semantics) gains importance over accuracy (syntax)” (ibid:158).

In Halliday’s terms, as a system network, the semantic network is a socially significant human activity and Ruquaiya Hasan used the semantic unit message as the point of origin for the network, which “is a linguistic unit at the semantic level” (Hasan 1996:165). Halliday’s and Hasan’s views are particularly important because the disadvantaged learner’s literacy emphasizes meaning more than structure and, the learner is engaged in social construction activities such as working towards the norm of society with regard to L₂.
Recent developments in educational theories have transformed the nature of writing experience in the classroom. These include encouraging the learners to start writing before they have learned to read, encouraging large amounts of free writing and teachers playing a supportive role in the learning of writing (Bereiter and Scardamalia in Beard 1993:128). Writing is looked at as a consequence of language development. Alison Littlefair (Beard 1993) says that writing is taking part in a social process or genre. We organise our written meanings in ways, which have evolved through a constant need to communicate for different purposes.

2.15 The ontological educational status of the disadvantaged learner

It is necessary not to lose focus of the socially and economically disadvantaged learner's efforts to integrate himself into the mainstream and such a recognition is a tribute to human potential which has to be understood and assimilated by the educational structures. The language that the learner uses, Bernstein points out is "in a convergent, restrictive fashion rather than a divergent, elaborative fashion" (Passow et al 1967:215). He explains further that the learner may be using a public language which characterizes their socializing process and which is different from formal language.

One of the distinguishing features of these two languages is that the formal language speaker makes highly individual selection and permutation of
syntax but the user of the public language faces rigidity of syntax and the restricted use of formal possibilities for verbal organization. Logical modification may be rendered in a crudely linguistic manner. Nadkarni's opinion is that "language has no interests" (Agnihotri 1994:135). The disadvantaged learner speaks the public language as his interest is also to appropriate the form focused language a little later, which is desirable on his part and unquestionable on the society's part because society cannot question the need to learn a language in terms of grammar and syntax.

According to Miriam Goldberg, if "the presently disadvantaged child is not to be fettered by his ignorance, not to be relegated to the ranks of the unemployable in a society which provides increasing opportunities to the academically competent and has less and less room for the functionally illiterate, then the school has a central role to play" (in Passow 1967:482). Verma says that "teaching will have to impart a certain minimal competence in the skills of communication" (in Agnihotri 1994:98). Child says that "we have a long way to go in trying to comprehend and do something about the credibility gap which exists between pupils, teachers, parents and society as to the place of a formal system of education in the life-chances of an individual .... There will have to be a considerable shift in syllabus content and design as changing patterns of work and leisure, individuals' expectations and technological advances bite deeper and deeper into our present way of life."
Unfortunately, society inadvertently generates in the young expectations which the educational system can rarely fulfill” (in Shorrocks-Taylor 1998:xxxii). All the above views point to the direction where Halliday’s and Hasan’s understanding of “meaning is the fulcrum on which literacy balances, while dipping in different directions…” (Willinsky 1990:73).

One of the directions in which the meaning of literacy points to is that of writing – L₂ writing. Writing cannot be looked upon as a generalized item. More so, with L₂ writing in multilingual contexts and multicultural backgrounds. It is not possible to aspire for educational goals with universal descriptions of writing classes in the Indian context. Descriptions of L₂ writing by learners have to account for their language strengths. Bialystok (2001:155) says, “...the opportunity to speak one of the languages is so limited that the child fails to advance into the sophisticated structural forms that characterize written text.” Edelsky (1996:53 opines that “... highly specified blanket policies (with particular reference to L₂ writing) are bound to conflict with particular conditions at local sites.”

2.16 L₂ writing for the disadvantaged learner

Speakers have their language uses in embedded social practices of reading and writing, one of them being the convention of literacy. With the disadvantaged learners, the social practice of language in the form of literacy is
an attempt at the socialization process, and the negotiation of meaning with the wider society.

Michael Stubbs (1980:15-16) points out that, “to make sense of written material we need to have more than simply the ‘linguistic’ characteristics of the text; in addition to these characteristics we need to recognize that any writing system is deeply embedded in attitudinal, cultural, economic and technological constraints...reading and writing are therefore also sociolinguistic activities. People speak, listen, read, and write in different social situations for different purposes.... If a coherent theory of literacy is to be developed, it will have to account for the place of written language, both in relation to the forms of spoken language and also in relation to the communicative functions served by different types of language in different social settings.” Stubbs, urges emphasis on “literacy as a mode of language and on its social functions” (in Street 1984:87). To consider Stubbs’ suggestion that literacy is a way of using language, it may be essential to look at the theoretical approaches to writing.

Rebecca Hughes cites John Halverson’s critical views from his article on “Olson on Literacy”:

“In particular, Halverson takes issue with the notion that the means of communication predetermines the content”:
Both language modalities (speech and writing) can be used in the same way and for the same purposes. Both can be explicit or vague, logical or illogical, adequately or inadequately informative, lucid or opaque, both can be ideational or interpersonal, true or false, wise or stupid; both presuppose shared knowledge. (Halverson 1991 in Rebecca Hughes 1996).

Melanie Sperling points out that “review of writing research is grounded in a social cognitive theory of writing and literacy that sees writing, like language in general, as a meaning—making activity that is socially and culturally shaped and individually and socially purposeful (Brandt 1990; Dyson 1995; Hower 1994; Freedman 1994; Heath 1983; Nystrand 1986; Sperling 1993). As such, writing cannot be spoken of without reference to the broader social contexts in which it is situated. Relatedly, in learning to write, learners are assumed to be constructing contextually situated theories of discourse, that is, theories of the way writing functions and how it is used and interpreted by different people in different sociocultural contexts” (Sperling 1996:55). It is a matter of great interest that the disadvantaged bilingual learner makes an attempt, shows quite a readiness to write in L₂ when writing itself is considered to be difficult.

Sperling goes on to explain that what inspires this view of writing and literacy to a great extent are the language theories of Vygotsky (1962,1978)
and Bakhtin (1981:276) for both of whom language represents a process rooted in the social world. Vygotsky linked language acquisition to cognitive development; he asserted that what begins in the social context as actively constructed verbal and non-verbal interactions between child and others is internalized by the child as the raw material of thought. The process of using language to communicate with others, whether in speaking or in writing, may be said to be the re-externalization of this process. Bakhtin linked language and text to the ongoing dialogue between individuals and social context, discourse itself reflecting such social interaction in being “entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents” (Bakhtin 1981). “The utterance”, said Bakhtin, “proves to be a very complex and multiplanar phenomenon if considered not in isolation and with respect to its author only, but as a link in the chain of speech communication and with respect to other, related utterances” (Bakhtin, 1986:92-93 in Sperling 1996:55-56).

It is also useful to understand another position that writing is similar to speaking following the Bakhtinian concept of utterance. Writing like speaking is inherently conversational according to Bereiter and Scadamalia 1982; Bruffee 1984; Rubin 1988 in Sperling 1996:64).
Freedman's research in 1994 with urban classrooms of diverse student populations in California with four similar classes in the UK concluded that “classroom interactions are critical to writing, and, furthermore, students interact on a “continuum of involvement” with one another: interactions can be more or less involving for different participants, and, hence, more or less meaningful for their writing” (Sperling 1996:72). It can be seen that interaction and involvement among learners leads to construction of shared social knowledge which gets manifested in the speech-like, speech-kind of writing where word order may not be kept to and formal language syntactic rules may not be strictly adhered to. Such writing indicates literacy which is the knowledge of language as the learner moves along the line of learning a language.

2.17 L₂ functional literacy as survival process for the disadvantaged learner

If interactions help in promoting the written mode of language, which constitutes literacy for the socially and economically disadvantaged learner, then Graff asserts that literacy is context-dependent. He says that “literacy can be established neither arbitrarily nor abstractly for all members of the population” (Graff 1979:29 in Street 1984:109). As Jernudd (1981) suggests, “the modern discipline of linguistics, with its very particular ways of studying formal properties of language, generally serves needs different from those of many Third World countries, where diverse questions concerning language use
are often far more appropriate” (Tollefson 1995:42). These questions often overlap with issues of culture and Walker (1984) argues that “social and political change is both reflected and constituted by language” (Walker, 1984:185 in Tollefson, 1995:47)). Pennycook carries the argument further by referring to “the sense of culture as the process by which people make sense of their lives, a process always involved in struggles over meaning and representation” (ibid:47). He continues to explain that he is “in favour of a critical paradigm that acknowledges human agency and looks at how people’s lives are regulated by language, culture, and discourse but also at how people both resist those forms and produce their own forms. Importantly too, this view suggests that people around the world are not merely passive consumers of culture and knowledge but active creators” (ibid:48-49).

The disadvantaged learners are also active creators because their L2 resources and inputs are scarce, few and less. Yet, they courageously engage in the active creation of language. It is literacy in two senses. One is the knowledge to use boldly the language they are learning and the other is to have such a knowledge as to desire to use it. Pennycook also suggests that language-spread should not be reduced to linguistic imperialism but that it should “examine the effects of the spread of English, how people take up English in their daily lives, what is done with “the world language which
history has forced down our throats” (Achebe, 1975:220 in Tollefson, 1995:50)).

It will be useful to understand what Catherine Brunner says about the disadvantaged that as the learner “interacts with his environment, his self-concept begins to form, the consent and pattern of his language develop, skills in social processes evolve, attitudes toward learning take shape, and concepts which enable him to interpret and organize his environment begin to form. While the early years of life are critical for all children, they are particularly crucial for children who live amid economic, social and educational impoverishment where experience is restricted and development likely to be retarded” (Witty 1967:145).

Is our understanding going to be a mere description of the disadvantaged or a description of his struggle to involve himself in the socialization process?

In their Editorial essay, Clark and Ivanic (1999) comment on the value of critical language awareness among bilingual learners. They say that “over the last ten years several people have focused on the value of critical language awareness for bilingual learners where their language of instruction (usually English) is a second or foreign language (Martin-Jones, Clark, Wallace). Two
developments were responsible for this. Firstly, academics and practitioners who were concerned about bilingualism, language maintenance and language rights were extremely active in this period, arguing that teachers should pay explicit attention to the status of languages and should encourage learners to stand up for their rights to use languages other than the dominant one (s), even when this would be flouting conventions and rules of ‘appropriacy’ (Clark et al, 1999:65).

In the realm of discourse analysis, Fairclough (1999:72) uses the metaphor of flexibility. While Bourdieu (1998 in Fairclough 1999:72) calls the emerging discourse of flexibility ‘a strong discourse’ which also penetrates into everyday language, Fairclough critiques this discourse saying that “a critical awareness of language is not wholly something which has to be brought to people from outside, it arises within the normal ways people reflect on their lives as part of their lives” (ibid:73). In trying to establish discourse as a dimension of language, Fairclough asserts “it is a matter of discourse, not just language – knowledges are increasingly constituted in multi-semiotic ways in contemporary society (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996; New London Group 1996). Information or knowledge based late modern societies are characterized, as Giddens has put it, by enhanced reflexivity – we are constantly reshaping our social practices on the basis of knowledge about those practices … what is different about late modernity is the ways in which ‘expert
systems' (such as the services and social sciences) are systematically integrated into reflexive processes (Giddens 1991). These expert systems can be thought of as evaluating existing knowledges in the practical domain in focus...and producing new knowledges, since knowledges are constituted as discourses, particular ways of using language, this means that they are in the business of evaluating and changing discourses” (Fairclough 1999:74).

In the field of education, Fairclough observes that “it is assumed that there is a given and accepted way of using language to do certain things, as if discourse was a simple matter of technique, whereas any way of using language which gets to be given and accepted does so through applications of power which violently exclude other ways, and any way of using language within any social practice is socially contestable and likely to be contested.... In a critical view of education, knowledge and ‘skills’ are indeed taught and learnt, but they are also questioned. A central concern is what counts as knowledge or skill (and therefore what does not), for whom, why, and with what beneficial or problematic consequences” (ibid).

It can be understood that literacy in the field of education, following Fairclough’s observations, acts as a technique that is apparently context-free but, paradoxically, concealing discourses of hegemony. It can also be seen that the disadvantaged learners are taught. The learners too have a lot of learning
and intelligence as they question established social practices of which they may not be beneficiaries and, moreover, create problematic circumstances for them in the outside world.

David Olson (1994:43) says that “literacy is not just a basic set of mental skills isolated from everything else. It is the competence to exploit a particular set of cultural resources. It is the evolution of those resources in conjunction with the knowledge and skill to exploit those resources for particular purposes that makes up literacy...we require a richer more diversified notion of literacy.” Elsewhere he says that “any understanding of literacy will have to pay attention to the structure of the culture into which it is introduced” (ibid:52). Brian Street (1984:212) also says that the “local language, culture and thinking has to be taken into account and not simply written off.”

Olson suggests that “writing systems...do not represent speech. Writing systems create the categories in terms of which we become conscious of speech. To paraphrase Whorf (1956), we introspect our language along lines laid down by our scripts. We have seen what our scripts reveal to us; we turn now to what they may conceal” (Olson 1994:90). Describing the presence of illocutionary force in writing, he suggests that, indeed, the discovery and then the management of illocutionary force make up a fundamental part of the
history of literacy. The history of reading may be seen, in part, as a series of attempts to recognize and to cope with what is not represented in a script” (ibid:93). These observations prove that language as a system needs to be read, understood and negotiated. The system which treats the question of logical form, Wittgenstein assumes, “comes not from penetrating the logical depths of sentential structure to reveal logical simples but from comparing and contrasting the ways in which different sentences are used in different realms of life” (Katz 1971:7-8). From this observation of Katz about Wittgenstein, it can be understood that the disadvantaged learner is actually framing “different sentences” and, therefore, these propositions may be telling us that “what must be added to the dead signs in order to make a live proposition is something immaterial, with properties different from all mere signs. But if we had to name anything, which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its use (ibid). Olson argues that “it is sufficient that one arrives at a meaning, not necessarily the meaning…the so-called post-modern concept of interpretation would allow for the element of subjectivity, for inference to the best explanation” (Olson 1994:116-117). He continues to elaborate that “modern hermeneutical theory focuses on means for achieving shared understandings. Hence, the kind of competence which students are expected to achieve now-a-days is not merely to grasp the rhetorical form but to understand something of the mind of the writer and of the writer’s assumptions about the mind of the reader” (ibid:135).
As an educational goal, talking about literacy, Paulo Freire (1970:65) argues that men and women are historical beings with an “unfinished character” and the “transformational character of society necessitates that education be an ongoing activity.”

2.18 Relevance of functional literacy in L₂

The socially and economically disadvantaged learner has the cognitive capacity to enter into dialogical relations with the teacher in the ‘public sphere’ (Habermas 1979) of education, employment and opportunity.

Brian Street (1984) explains that functional literacy as a social practice makes an effort to put learners’ needs and interests in a more relevant setting. For catering to the functional literacy needs of the learners, Street argues that “we need to build institutions which enable people to acquire what they say they want and not what teachers, radical or otherwise, think they want.” Functional literacy in L₂ can be understood in the argument of Grosjean as “a notion of bilingual competence in which the languages in the repertoire complement one another’s strengths and weaknesses to produce the type of composite language competence suited to the demands of the bilingual” (Agnihotri et al 1994:55). If functional literacy can be viewed as an aspect of language development then “it is not merely a case of the language having
more linguistic resources like new technical terms, reference tools, etc. and symbolic status as national language, but also a case of the language allowing its speakers have more economic resources and political power" (Annamalai in Koul 1994:6).

Srivastava asserts that “the concept of literacy is defined as an instance of mass upsurge and a call for the participation of socially deprived and economically disadvantaged literate masses in the heritage of written culture” (Koul 1994:55).

The 1993 Delhi declaration (Dunford Seminar Report, 1994:93) to which nine signatories with whom about 75% of the world’s illiterates are bound, discusses functional literacy for those in a largely non-formal system. But an aspect of the framework at this forum is useful. It says that a “government committed to nationalism must recognize the importance of a reading/working knowledge of English as a basic component of functional literacy. The Dunford Seminar Report of 1994 of the British Council deals with the issue of functional literacy for development and in particular, issues of language and method.

According to Paul Fordham, the 1990 World Conference on ‘Education for All’ emphasized that “the promotion of literacy has become an integral part
of the wider promotion of ‘basic education’ – the various learning tools and content ‘required by human beings to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives and to continue learning’” (WCEFA 1990, Article 1, World Declaration in 1994 in Dunford Seminar Report, 1994:13). The basic education suggests that one of the main routes to literacy is primary schooling, which is the formal system. Since the Second World War in America and Britain, approaches to functional literacy assumed that the beneficiaries got jobs, prosperity, health and obtained a more satisfactory mode of living (ibid:27). But, according to Paul Fordham, “in the later 1990s we are more likely to be concerned with local initiatives and less with the transformation of whole societies than we were twenty years ago; and more concerned with local literacies and languages than with essentially political agendas. For example, we may need local languages, lingua francas and, for international exchange, ‘world’ languages” (ibid:15). To understand the spectrum of uses to which a second language like English may be put to, “the classroom becomes a station on the line of a literate life, a life that will not be so neatly compartmentalized in its learning” (Willinsky 1990:40). According to Roger Bowers, the “definition of functional literacy and related objectives needed to be agreed locally. If the first principle and primary need in a situation was recognized as economic survival, then it could be the case that very basic objectives in terms of literacy may be appropriate in that place, at that point in time” (Dunford
Seminar Report 1994:10). Bowers also points out that the “intrinsic value of literacy is that the freedom of language is a human right underpinning freedom of thought, freedom of expression and freedom of association” (ibid:9). Can we deny the disadvantaged learner the basic human right of the freedom of language to uphold an argument for grammaticality, logic, rationalism and objectivity. One of the consequences of the human right to use language is functional literacy in any language.

To talk of norms and standards is “educational violence” which engenders shame, confusion and self-doubt as a result of their ‘education’ (Cummins and Skutnabb-Kangas 1988:45). In the name of norms in L2 “many minority children are being forced to feel ashamed of their mother tongues, their parents, their origins, their group and their culture” (ibid:18) “groups defined on the basis of their mother tongue have thus unequal access to educational resources, that is, these educational systems reflect linguicism” (ibid:20). Therefore, to talk of norms and standards and the lack of these while describing a disadvantaged learner is to be blind to his language strengths.

Ludo Verhoeven (1994:13) states that “the transmission of specific varieties of oral and written language is almost exclusively controlled by the educational system. Societies differ in the way they distribute their communicative resources, while at the same time social classes and individuals
within these classes differ in the extent to which they have access to these resources."

Skutnabb-Kangas and Jim Cummins (1988:36-37) point out "high levels of bilingualism/bi-culturalism benefit every child, but for minority children bilingualism, is a necessity. It is possible to achieve if the main principle is followed, which seems to hold across different situations: support via all institutional measures the language which is otherwise less likely to develop in the cognitively demanding decontextualized register." One of the institutional measures would have to be initiated by the teacher who has a near-total understanding of the needs and resources of the learner. Verhoeven (1994:11-12) says that "in order to do justice to the literacy needs of ethnic minorities, the competence of functional literacy should be defined in terms of their multilingual and multicultural background."

2.19 Conclusion

A lot of work has been done in second language acquisition related to individual learners' language learning needs and their rights to education. Chapters I and II have attempted to focus on the issues of the L2 writing concerns of disadvantaged learners. Broader aspects of literacy and functional literacy have been considered to arrive at a framework for recognising the functional literacy in L2 of the disadvantaged learners. Chapters I and II have
shown the pre-occupation with some of Cummins’s concepts, bilingualism, multilingualism disadvantaged learners’ background, multi-lingual contexts, L₂ needs in bilingual situations and the needs of the learners at the tertiary level of education.

The disadvantaged learner cannot be deprived of the language of wider communication and therefore, “functional bilingualism or trilingualism should not only be one of the aims of our educational system but it should also be built into its very structure” (Nadkarni in Agnihotri et al 1994:41). Bruner says, “school provides a powerful opportunity for exploring the implication of precepts for practice” (in Willinsky 1990:78-79). Therefore, the disadvantaged learner’s L₂ functional literacy will help in redesigning the curriculum to be flexible which will make society see that language learning is an on-going process.

The functional literacy of the disadvantaged learner especially is a proactive means of engaging himself with one’s local context as well as a wider social context. It is a means of inclusion into the social process. For the disadvantaged learners, functional literacy improves their condition in spite of a poor reading environment, and they have been learning to write in L₂ that is similar to their L₂ speech. They have been proving that education means functional literacy – a democratic, liberating, and integrative means to social
and economic development. Chapter III will discuss the functional literacy framework as a means to recognize the L₂ functional literacy of the disadvantaged learners.