CHAPTER III
THE RESEARCH DESIGN

3.0 Introduction

In Chapter Two, the theoretical background to the study was discussed. In this chapter, the research design adopted for the study is presented. As discussed in Chapter One, the focus of this study is to find ways, which help in identifying the communication potential in the L2 writing of the disadvantaged learner. The ability to communicate through L2 writing has already been discussed as functional literacy in Chapters I and II.

3.1 Design of the Study

The study developed as a result of this teacher-researcher's observation of L2 writing among disadvantaged learners. In the L2 classroom, it was often difficult to make the learners write or compose even on general topics such as Unemployment, Drug Addiction, Changes in the examination system, Joint-family system, Dowry as a social evil and some related topics. Interestingly, learners spoke on these topics at length in L1 and with some difficulty in L2. The emphasis of language production being on writing, it was felt that simpler topics, such as, topics of current interest, or topics which interest the students may be given for composition. This method of making them speak first in L1 helped in making more number of students to write. It was also felt that translation from L1 to L2
gives psychological support to the learner. Many learners show interest in L₂ writing if they are told to translate.

It was felt that a preliminary study could help us determine the nature of tasks and the selection of tasks for the main study. At every step of the preliminary study and the main study, it was important to keep in mind the poor socio-economic background of the learners. Very often, the parents are illiterate or they have primary school education only. The families cannot support the educational expenses of the learner. The learners depend on the scholarships. They travel long distances to reach their college. They converse, write and study content subjects in L₁. They realize the strong need to write in L₂. The drawbacks of their socio-economic background are not hurdles to their motivation; they do show evidence of L₂ use.

The teacher-researcher felt that random topics and tasks could be given sensing the mood or motivation level of the learners by eliciting whether they wished to write. If there was a positive response, simple topics or topics on which the students wished to write were given. A time limit was set and learners were asked to complete and hand in their scripts within that specified time.

An effort was made continuously over a period of one month to sustain learners' motivation to write by making them talk in L₁ on topics of their interest
for two minutes before they actually began to write in L₂. They were told that they had to complete writing within time. Learners were told not to be anxious about vocabulary, spelling and grammatical errors. Such instructions helped in developing their confidence to write in L₂. After a month, the teacher-researcher felt that a preliminary study involving more number of students might help in determining the nature and choice of tasks for the main study.

3.2 Description of the study

It was felt that the study could be conducted in two phases consisting of a preliminary study followed by the main study. The preliminary study was necessary to understand the L₂ characteristics in the writing of the socially and economically disadvantaged learner. Following this understanding, in the main study an attempt was made to explore the L₂ linguistic resources available to the disadvantaged learner at the tertiary level. The main study made an attempt to describe the disadvantaged learners' L₂ writing in terms of functional literacy. It tried to analyse the need to recognise the L₂ literacy of the disadvantaged learner and the importance of extending this to a framework of functional literacy.

3.3 Features of the preliminary study

The preliminary study was conducted for 110 students. They were given random tasks for paragraph writing. The tasks were random because the topics for paragraph writing were different. When the learners expressed inability to write in
L2, they were given the choice of translation. Learners wrote a paragraph in L1 and then translated it into L2.

After examining the scripts of 110 learners for evidence of functional literacy, some features have been described as follows:

For example,

1. “But the goverments had mad goverments school for the villages”.

   - Spelling error: governments
   - No plural used for school
   - Mad is used instead of bad. The reasons could be as simple as not being able to recall the letter, ‘b’, not having realised that he wrote ‘m’ for ‘b’ because he may have written in haste.

2. In the 2nd sample, the sentences go on like this:
   “Education larning man and woman knowledge and clavere anther tapic
   Educacion give mide exisige Educacion grw. Books read and writing knowledge devalop.

   There are several spelling errors:
   Educacion - education
larning - learning
clavere - clever
anther - another
topic - topic
mind - mind
exercise - exisige
grow - grw
develop - devalop.

The learner has used the same spelling education thrice. Anther, grw are examples to show that he is missing the letter 'o' in the spellings – another, grow. Mide is a word for mind. This spelling has resulted more due to listening problems. May be he was unable to catch the /n/ phoneme. Exisige is a phonological spelling which also shows the L₁ interference in his English pronunciation, which is reflected in the spelling. The structural aspects are missing. The learner perhaps means that education and learning are required by men and women. Knowledge and cleverness is another topic. Education gives exercise to the mind or Education is a mental exercise. The reading of books and writing helps the development of knowledge. Interestingly, the learner differentiates between knowledge and education. Education makes man grow in the sentence Education grw is a mature concept.

3. Super market is a part of bisseness.

Super market things not avalable poor people.
Supermarkets also given some jobs
Time save with super markets.

4. Lots of things situated in one are.

So buying items can easy and time saving also money saving.

In supermarket things are resonable rates and good quality.

In samples 3 and 4, there are spelling errors but the choice of words is correct. Structural aspects are missing but communication is achieved.

5. In the 5th sample, Holidays the learner translated from L₂ to L₁ where he could translate sentence by sentence. The L₁ translation shows a great deal of coherence.

In the L₂ writing, there are several spelling errors.

festavell -  festival
cook -  cooking
villege -  village
frinds -  friends
soping -  shopping
riding -  reading

The learner says, "I will be joy with friend in holidays. Any way I spend holiday joy:"

The learner means that he was happy with friends in holidays and he spent holidays happily or joyfully.

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Therefore, the preliminary study showed several examples, which helped in the formulation of the theory of functional literacy. This preliminary study for 110 students was conducted in the same institution where this teacher-researcher works. It was conducted thus because there are several disadvantaged learners in the institution. All the 110 students were from the first, second and third year courses of the undergraduate programmes offered in the educational institution. The study was conducted mainly to have an idea of recurring patterns in spellings, usage, lexis, syntactical structures that are commonplace among these learners. The study attempted to look for such patterns, which do not impede communication but may have errors in spelling and grammar. But the learner's vocabulary helped in identifying a feature of functional literacy because some words in a shared context such as a bilingual or a multilingual one may be understood by a large number of people in the society.

The samples provided an interesting list of spellings and lexis which have been documented below. The list of spellings from the 110 samples show that the disadvantaged learner tries to follow the sound patterns of L₂ speech but the L₁ sounds are also present in the spellings. The spellings are closer to the L₁ pronunciation of phonemes in particular socio-economic groups in rural or semi-urban areas in bilingual contexts.
Spellings were particularly chosen because spelling indicates the knowledge of a word. Spelling also indicates the influence of sound on writing in L₂. The spellings listed may be incorrect but follow pronunciation patterns in a bilingual situation. The spellings show the level of knowledge of the disadvantaged learner. He may know the word but the spelling has to be learnt. He tries to follow the sound patterns of L₂ speech but the L₁ sounds are present in the L₂ spellings.

For example,

**Learners’ spelling (LS)**

parson

sajetion, sugession, suggsation

wakar

destap

darcamstion

dternational

**Correct spelling (CS)**

person

suggestion

worker

disturb

circumstances

dternational

Another pattern is doubling the consonant

**Learners’ Spelling (LS)**

romming

slepping

affraid

**Correct Spelling (CS)**

roaming

sleeping

afraid
always

losing

powerful

plans

Other instances are shown where consonants are added in the middle of the word.

The pattern is, to drop one consonant from double consonant spellings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners’ Spelling (LS)</th>
<th>Correct Spelling (CS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fellow</td>
<td>fellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joly</td>
<td>jolly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exlent</td>
<td>excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>romming</td>
<td>roaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slepping</td>
<td>sleeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>afraid</td>
<td>afraid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all ways</td>
<td>always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>losing</td>
<td>losing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phowerfull</td>
<td>powerful</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*romming* and *slepping* may be treated as a pattern showing “gemination”, that is, a sequence of identical segments within a single morpheme. Instances in the regional language, Telugu, are

- Amma - అమ్మ (mother)
- Nimma - నమ్మ (lemon)
Bomma - .Linked (doll)
Komma - .Branch (branch)

And,
Appu - .Loan (loan)
Pappu -  (cooked cereal/pulses)
Tappu -  (wrong, mistake)
Muppu -  (danger)

Another pattern to be noted is the replacement of one consonant with another. This can be understood by the rule that General Indian English has one phoneme /v/ in place of English phonemes /w/ and /v/. The first two examples in the following list come under this rule. Then spelling fowerfull for the sound /p/ could be due to a confusion between /p/ and /f/ as a result of the interference of the mother tongue. Similarly, flains for planes, foregam for program. The disadvantaged learner acquires consonant /f/ the labio-dental more than the bilabial plosive /p/.

**Learners’ Spelling (LS)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners’ Spelling (LS)</th>
<th>Correct Spelling (CS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vastage</td>
<td>wastage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vaste</td>
<td>waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jeneration</td>
<td>generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fowerfull</td>
<td>powerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flains</td>
<td>planes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sometimes, an extra consonant is added

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners’ Spelling (LS)</th>
<th>Correct Spelling (CS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yelest</td>
<td>eldest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yeever</td>
<td>ever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yaight</td>
<td>eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyat</td>
<td>cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yelephant</td>
<td>elephant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adding an extra consonant is an example or pattern showing “epenthesis” or an extra sound inserted in a word.

Sometimes, the spelling changes are a mixture of several sound patterns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learners’ Spelling (LS)</th>
<th>Correct Spelling (CS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lezi, lagey, laysy</td>
<td>lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advies</td>
<td>advice/advise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anothere, anther</td>
<td>another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiemes</td>
<td>times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heard</td>
<td>hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wonderd</td>
<td>wondered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learners' Spelling (LS)</td>
<td>Correct Spelling (CS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>oncy</td>
<td>any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brathrs</td>
<td>brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saraounding</td>
<td>surrounding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waist</td>
<td>waste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ideal</td>
<td>idle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seaven</td>
<td>seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worndering</td>
<td>wandering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evryday</td>
<td>everyday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enjoyd</td>
<td>enjoyed</td>
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<tr>
<td>idia</td>
<td>idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learners’ Spelling (LS)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Correct Spelling (CS)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becaus</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sum</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tim</td>
<td>time</td>
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<tr>
<td>valuble</td>
<td>valuable</td>
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<tr>
<td>empration</td>
<td>impression</td>
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<tr>
<td>tenction</td>
<td>tension</td>
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<tr>
<td>terroristum, terraraisam, terarisame</td>
<td>terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fames</td>
<td>famous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distracted, destroyed</td>
<td>destroyed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The patterns of spelling variations substantiate what Quirk (1972) said about phonetics and orthography.

....unless we have had special training in phonetics so that we can recognize sounds and write them in phonetic script, we have no other means of writing English than in terms of the conventions of English orthography. If, for eg., we write *thought* as *thort*, we are not departing from the principles of English orthography: we are merely replacing one set of possibilities by another – instead of the –ough – as in bought, ought, nought, thought, we have the – or – of port, sort, short, fort.

In the spellings of the learners, the aspect of literacy that is captured is that “...the context within which we acquire language significantly mediates meaning and understanding in any subsequent context of use”. (Castell and Luke, 1986). Therefore, the learners prove their language strength by using words, which are correct in the contexts though the spellings require attention. The purpose of the collection of learners’ spellings in a random manner from the preliminary study is to show the generalisations that are present in English spelling among L2 learners in bilingual contexts of use. Halliday (1985:29) says that “we tend to take it for granted that spelling should be totally uniform; but there is no compelling reason why it should be, provided the principles are clear”. Just as a single phonological system helps in the understanding of a wide variation in dialect, the same principle will work for writing, according to Halliday.
3.3.1 Observations

Of the 110 samples collected for the preliminary study, some general patterns in forms were found.

1. use of \textit{was} instead of \textit{were}
2. use of \textit{was always} when always is not required.
3. use of forms - \textit{are lived, are hated}
4. use of ‘do’ support with ‘ed’ verbs, for e.g. \textit{don’t minded}.
5. confusion in the choice of words.
6. use of unusual synonyms.
7. substitution of region –specific $L_1$

For example:

1. time pass work to mean not doing any work.
2. wonderd to mean not doing any work.
3. adjective “useless” to qualify roaming

8. “rounding”, “saraounding” means going about or wandering or roaming in the village.
9. little man –youngest brother
10. he is time waist – he wastes time
11. “maintained lazy” means always lazy. It is to be noted that the learners’ spellings are correct in this instance.
14. “rounded that area” means wandering.

15. “walked away” means wandering.

16. “careless them” means did not care for them.

The general features of L₂ functional literacy can be summarize as use of ‘be’ form verb with main verb in ‘ed’ form, use of unusual synonyms, spelling which follow L₁ sound patterns, mix-up of letters in the spellings and stretching the meanings of words.

3.4 The findings of the preliminary study

The preliminary study gave insights into the L₂ writing characteristics of the disadvantaged learners. The functional literacy in L₂ of disadvantaged learners in bilingual contexts is a proactive way of engaging themselves with their local context as well as a wider social context. Such a literacy may not answer the rigors of grammaticality but is considered to be adequate for acceptability during the process of research. They seem to have learnt to speak and write without an enriching L₂ linguistic environment. Apparently, the linearity of skills acquisition seems to be different. Learners show a capacity to write despite a poor reading environment.
3.5 Significance of the preliminary study

The preliminary study of 110 samples showed clearly what normal patterns of vocabulary, usage may be expected from the data in the main study. This study is evident of what Pattanayak (1981:167) says that “a second or foreign language learner carries within himself a system, not isolated speech sounds. What actually happens is that the entire English system becomes readjusted in terms of the system of the mother tongue as has been indicated earlier. This is not only true of single sounds but also true of the rules regarding gemination, conjunct formation, stress etc”. (Annamalai (in Rajendra Singh: 1998:148) says that “much of the grammar mentally constructed by an individual speaker may be shared by all individuals speaking the language, but some of it may be different between individuals. It is therefore possible to talk about many mental constructs of a language, as it is possible to talk about many theoretical constructs of it by grammarians”. Blanton’s view is important because she says that she is “convinced that making errors, and making them with impunity, is essential to students’ development as writers.” (1987:114). She quotes Moffett (1968) who says that errors are ‘essential learning instruments’ and that errors are a consequence of writing and making meaning of the learners’ realities. These views will help us understand and identify the features of L2 functional literacy, the focus of the present study.
3.6 The implications for the main study

Having understood that the L₁ system has been acquired prior to the L₂ system and that, errors are a natural consequence in second language learning, the development of L₂ writing among disadvantaged learners is a capacity which needs to be recognised. It was felt that we need to understand further the capacities of the learners to write within a poor reading environment. A smaller sample study of a few learners would help us understand the features of functional literacy. While it is difficult to teach 110 students at the same time, it was felt that a smaller sample size will help the teacher researcher to focus on the L₂ literacy of the learner which in many ways is dependent and related to L₁ literacy. Cummins’ BICS-CALP distinction explains that “academic deficits are often created by teachers and psychologists who fail to realize that it takes language minority students considerably longer to attain grade/age-appropriate levels in English academic skills than it does in English face-to-face communicative skills”. (Cummins, 1986:152). With many of the disadvantaged learners, pronunciation and lexical knowledge is not a matter of deficit. Learners follow different patterns in pronunciation and spelling. The data from the preliminary study shows that learners have the grammatical competence which is one of the four competence that Canale and Swain’s (1980) “communicative competence” talks about. Grammatical competence, according to Canale and Swain is the knowledge of the rules which may be minimally evident in sentence construction or word order. Yet, academic performance is measured in terms of proficiency. It needs to be
emphasised that the disadvantaged learner’s competence is more in terms of communicative skills, which is termed as functional literacy because we are examining students’ writing samples. Cummins and Swain (1986) also argue that context embedded L₂ input will result in ultimately developing L₂ skills in context-reduced situations. Bell’s (1995) view is also “that transfer of linguistic and literacy knowledge between languages is possible, particularly in certain combinations of circumstances”. (Bell, 1995: 689). To find connections between Cummins’ and Swain’s view and Bells’ view, it may be suggested that “context-embedded situations” could mean situations that the disadvantaged learner is familiar with and “combinations of circumstances” means the disadvantaged learner’s socio-economic background, learning environment needs, L₁ literacy, translation capacities to prove L₂ literacy, “willingness to communicate” (Dornyei, 2003:12-14), motivation and the risk-taking ability in writing in L₂.

The data of the preliminary study supported by theoretical concerns as put forth by Canale and Swain (1980), Cummins and Swain (1986), Bell (1995) give the justification for the assumptions of functional literacy in L₂ which becomes the focus for the main research study. Some of the common features of L₂ literacy which emerged through the data of the preliminary study were, the use of L₁, translations. A need was felt for observation of L₂ literacy with the help of the features identified in the preliminary study, supported by a closer observation of
the environment of the disadvantaged learner which necessitated an ethnographic approach for the main study.

3.7 Features of the main study

The main study was necessary to focus on the research issues, develop the research tools, and decide on the nature of the tasks. Following the tradition of classroom research described by Lier (1988), it was found that such research which is strictly descriptive helps teachers who are oriented to the communicative value of language. Classroom research also gave insights into the complexities of classroom situations, the complex relationships between learners in the classroom and the society that influences these relationships. Therefore, the main study which is classroom based is an attempt to observe the L₂ characteristics in the writing of the disadvantaged learner that helps him cope with communication in a bilingual context. For this purpose, the prescribed language syllabus for the second year undergraduate examination includes writing components of which the basic unit of composition is paragraph writing. Writing in L₂ is difficult for most learners in the colleges due to the several disadvantages that they are surrounded with. The following sections attempt a ‘thick’ description of the conditions of disadvantage for the learners.
3.7.1 The need for a profile of the disadvantaged learner in the classroom - a thick description

As discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the disadvantaged learner is often a first generation learner entering mainstream education. Apart from the well-known, characteristic description of the disadvantaged learner as socially backward and economically poor, recent research has stressed the need to look at the disadvantaged learner from a different angle. The disadvantaged learner also has certain positive characteristics such as the motivation to use L2 despite being inaccurate in L2 grammar and not so fluent in L2 use. He has an anxiety to prove his language abilities, which may be called an “inter-language” (Selinker, 1972), that is, a developmental stage.

3.7.1.1 The disadvantaged learner’s home background

Very often, the disadvantaged learner’s parents are engaged in agriculture. He comes to the college because of the scholarship, or government aid that funds the education of certain backward sections of society. The money earned through the scholarship is used to supplement the learner’s family income. He cannot spend the scholarship for his own educational purposes. Very often, the scholarship money helps his family meet long-standing debts or the money is saved to purchase agricultural raw materials like seeds or fertilizers. Sometimes, the money is spent or saved for the expenses of a social event in the family. Thus, the home retains his economic backwardness.
3.7.1.2 The disadvantaged learner’s L₂

The disadvantaged learner in our context travels long distances by rail or bus to reach the college. Sometimes, he walks long distances to come to college. He attempts to overcome social backwardness by using L₂, especially in writing situations in bilingual contexts. He shows a “willingness to communicate” (Dornyei, 2003) and a readiness to write in spite of inaccuracies in usage. Most disadvantaged learners have acquired some knowledge of language or L₂, which can neither be incorrect nor so easily be accepted. Until the +2 level, the learner had attended lectures or teaching sessions, which did not emphasize upon his L₂ performance. Whatever knowledge of L₂ the disadvantaged learner has picked up as a consequence of schooling can be termed as his proficiency which needs to be understood in terms of the lack of several essential conditions for language learning such as a natural environment simulated or activated in terms of television news, music, films, fiction, newspapers in L₂ which builds up the exposure and input possibilities for learning to occur. His kin-group and peer-group manage several daily activities with L₁ use, and, therefore, interaction in L₂ is severely limited.

3.7.1.3 The disadvantaged learner’s performance in L₂

Even after the lack of essential external conditions for language learning which impede his motivation and willingness to communicate, the disadvantaged learner shows an ability to write in L₂ where the communication carries meaning
and message. It may be said that proficiency in terms of usage may not be so relevant as literacy in terms of communication. More often, the disadvantaged learner is able to get his message across in the Indian bilingual context and in shared contexts like educational settings. The learner is comfortable in L₂ speech and writing with the L₂ teachers.

Between the expectations of finding a place in the mainstream which insists on norm-oriented behaviour and the unsupportive backdrop of his environment, the learner copes with communication be it regular examinations or writing for social purposes. It is interesting to note that the readiness of the learner to write in L₂ is in itself evidence of his language ability. Despite spelling, phonological and syntactical deviations, the learner struggles to communicate with the help of his understanding of the world through the L₁. The manifest utterance is actually evidence of a system which does not resist the lexical, grammatical or phonetic systems of another language and if such an utterance is different from the known “standard” version, the understanding will have to move in the direction of unfolding the communicative contexts of such utterances. L₂ is spoken through code-mixing and L₂ is written for functional purposes. Writing in L₂ is an attempt to struggle to use L₂ for some worldly, social purpose, which helps the learner to be in the mainstream, Amaliraj (1995:96) says that “…language is learnt for communication in meaningful, purposeful, social and academic contexts. This is
what we need language for to communicate in real life and not to talk about language itself’.

3.7.1.4. The disadvantaged learner’s academic environment

The learner comes to the college at 10.00A.M. and leaves by 3.00 P.M. He attends lectures on life sciences, physical sciences, humanities, commerce, languages and the use of computers. He attends laboratory practicals in the science courses. In the timetable, one hour is allotted for L₂ learning for 5 days in a week. Very often, it is only the L₂ teacher who can speak to him in English inside and outside the classroom. L₁ meets most of the content teacher’s communication needs with the disadvantaged learners in terms of academic content or miscellaneous matters. The L₂ teacher can speak in L₂ only to the learner because this is the only possible way for them to listen to L₂ on a daily basis. It may be added that the L₂ teacher is deeply aware of the learner’s L₁ as a resource for communication and interaction. If the L₂ teacher becomes over-sympathetic and uses only L₁, then, injustice is being done to the learner. On several occasions, L₂ teachers listen to L₁ communication of disadvantaged learners and reply or respond slowly and in simple language to gradually build confidence among the learners.

Observations of co-curricular activities such as Essay Writing, Elocution and Debate activities in L₂ showed that the events were rarely attended by these
learners. Neither did they attempt writing in L2 for the college magazine. These activities actually supplement and complement the language learning efforts of the disadvantaged learner. Several content area teachers felt that these learners’ L2 was unsuitable for competitive activities but felt that L2 teachers required to focus on improving their writing abilities in the regular classroom. In the words of Cohen (1969: 77) “they frequently have had little experience in receiving approval for success in a learning task. They are “today” oriented and have difficulty in responding to long-range goals”. In informal discussions with several earlier batches of learners in the classroom, over 25 years of this teacher-researcher’s experience, it was observed that the disadvantaged learners were desirous of improving their writing skills irrespective of the examination demands. The professional knowledge of the teacher is characterized as ‘idiographic’ ‘particularistic’ primarily concerned, in other words, with the uniqueness and specificity of events and individuals in one’s own professional context”. (Bolster, 1993 in Mc Donough et al, 1997:22). The academic environment of the disadvantaged learner in the college and the professional context of the college for the teacher-researcher are conditions that could be explored further.

The teacher-researcher felt that L2 literacy, which will be described as functional literacy with the help of Bell’s (1993) study and Atkinson’s (1987) study is a learning state for the learner. In this state of learning, the learner gathers courage to write despite 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. Learning to attempt writing in L₂ within a backdrop of several, socio-economic, educational disadvantages speaks greatly about the positive attitudes of a bilingual learner. If "individual differences" (Skehan, 1982) 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 his determination to use L₂. The learner is caught between an anxious state of not being able to use L₂ in a grammatically acceptable way and the desire to acquire L₂ for social and occupational mobility. The learner is in the transient state of functional literacy in L₂.

Functional literacy 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 motivational 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 teacher/reader. In bilingual situations, where speaking in L₂ is unimportant, writing in L₂ is an
advantageous position for the learner to move forward in the continuum of learning a language.

The socially and economically disadvantaged learners prefer to attend language classes regularly provided the teacher is able to sustain their motivation through meaningful tasks which will help in increasing their confidence to write in L2 which, in turn, will improve their performance in the annual examination.

The learners in the college where the main study was carried out also said that the L2 writing classes may be planned in ways that would increase their L2 written output. Brannon and Knoblauch, (1982:159) say that “incentive is vital to improvement and also that it is linked crucially to the belief that one’s writing will be read earnestly”. It will be useful to recall R.C. Solomon’s view that functional literacy means “the skills that everyone in this society must learn if they are to have any possible chance at decent jobs and fair treatment and protection. Its practical importance is unquestionable and therefore, usually unquestioned”. (in Castelle et al, 1986: 41). Sawyer’s view is that “writing is required for all but the most menial jobs, that it is a skill they will need to master, and they seek out and welcome effective instruction in it”. (1977: 45)

After observing the learners’ positive attitudes towards L2 writing, the teacher researcher found it useful to allow the writer to write on whatever topic he
chooses to write. This made the teacher-researcher feel the need to describe the teaching-learning conditions in the classroom which may be different from a traditional classroom where the learner has to listen to whatever the teacher says. (see Section 3.7) Some of these issues are discussed in the following sections.

3.8 L₂ writing versus L₂ speech for the disadvantaged learner

It is interesting to note that L₂ writing is readily taken up than L₂ speech by the disadvantaged learner in a bilingual context. The less grammatical but yet meaningful aspects of language give scope for academic achievement. The teachers of socially disadvantaged learners may have to carry the responsibility of attempting to validate the less grammatical but more communicative aspect of language use. This is how "teachers become researchers by identifying questions important to them and seeking answers in their own classes" (Ellis 1994:689 in Mc Donough and Mc Donough, 1997:67). In the words of Horn (1970:139) "it is the duty of the teacher to avoid forcing an external standard upon his students; he should simply adapt his techniques to the structure of the students' dialect and let the overwhelming power of the culture do its work". Part of the power of the culture is to encourage the use of L₂. As Gee (1986:90) says, "like oral language, written language is acquired through actual use, not through exercises for later use".

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For the learners in the classroom, the improvement in their disadvantaged condition is reflected in the way they have learnt to write much before they have started to speak $L_2$. The absence of a rich reading environment in $L_2$ is notable with regard to their learning to write in $L_2$. They have learnt to write in $L_2$ without an enabling linguistic environment at home. Though they learn their subjects through $L_1$ medium of instruction in college, the disadvantaged learners show an ability to write in $L_2$. They have been proving that education in a wide sense means functional literacy in writing. Therefore, as Horn says, “the goal of language instruction for disadvantaged children should be to enable them to achieve sufficient flexibility to communicate easily on more than one level and in diverse situations”. (1970: 134).

If flexibility in written communication can be understood as functional literacy, then, functional literacy in $L_2$ for the socially and economically disadvantaged is a process which makes him become gradually advantaged. By using $L_2$, the learner exercises his right to use a language, to struggle for occupational opportunity, to improve his socio-economic status. By not acknowledging the learner’s awareness to exercise his rights, members in a society may be culpable for perpetuating a hegemonic order where a language that is formal in all aspects controls individuals, communities and societies. By insisting on structure, patterns and norms in language use, the socially and economically disadvantaged learner’s linguistic effort is not acknowledged. A denial of
educational and occupational opportunity purely on a narrow vision of language denies equity and justice in society. "...often one fails to realize that within a family the journey from total familial illiteracy to total familial literacy can take 2 or 3 generations". (Daswani in Olson and Torrance, 2001:290). Therefore, refusal to acknowledge language ability in a way maintains and deepens the divide between the advantaged and otherwise.

3.9 Cummins' interdependence of language hypothesis and functional literacy

According to Jim Cummins' interdependence of language hypothesis, there is a common underlying proficiency in any language user. This helps in giving practice to the learner to process language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to see the different ways in which their two languages organize reality. Also, processing of information helps in easier understanding of concepts through a "threshold level of linguistic competence" (Cummins 1976, Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas 1977) or the aspect of "comprehensible output" (Cummins and Swain, 1986). The terms "threshold level of linguistic competence" and "comprehensible output" suggest the evidence of a few grammatical aspects, simple syntax, inaccurate spellings, and vocabulary which can become meaningful in shared contexts. When these features are present in L2 writing, then, it may be termed as L2 functional literacy. This is evident in a bilingual situation.
L₁ the home language may be widely used in all communicative situations but L₂ in writing 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. Atkinson (1987:245) says that “activities involving translation from the mother tongue can help to remedy this problem in that they encourage students to make the important step of beginning to think not in terms of ‘How does one say ‘X’ in English?’ but rather ‘How can I express X in English?’ An overall adequate communication output in writing situations in L₂ can be termed as functional literacy. Such literacy corresponds semantically to L₁ and gradually enables the acquisition of lexical and syntactic proficiency in L₂.

For example, the following sentence from the random samples is a telling instance. “He was arrounding (emphasis mine) without work (or) work less,” meaning to say that he was wandering without work. L₂ functional literacy serves as a short-term communication need for spontaneous writing in sudden needy situations but with a consciousness that L₂ is amenable to prospective improvement.

3.10 Understanding the disadvantaged learner’s L₂ functional literacy

The definition of literacy is inducted through careful fieldwork on “the social meaning of literacy: that is, the roles these abilities (reading and writing)
play in social life; the varieties of reading and writing available for choice; the contexts for their performance; and the manner in which they are interpreted and tested, not by experts, but by ordinary people in ordinary activities” (Szwed, 1981:14 in Collins and Blot, 2003:35). The learner in the classroom is a part of the society through the social institution of education, which is a conscious choice and action to remove himself from social and economic disadvantage. His ordinary life is a “historically constituted domain profoundly shaped by its separation from elite classes, dominant institutions, and systematic-formal procedures”. (in Collins and Blot, 2003:35).

According to D.P. Pattanayak (1981), functional literacy in terms of UNESCO norms was considered to be equivalent to education of the level of Class V. But in the circumstances where the emphasis is on communication, the specification of goals has to be clarified in terms of skills, learner’s confidence level, creative interpretations of a stimulus, problem solving ability, etc. For example, in random samples the use of the word ‘smile’ which refer to ‘happy’ or ‘happiness’ is an imaginative choice indicating an ability to create and connect. Pattanayak (1981) says that the only way to ensure fairness and assessment of both individuals and groups in a pluralistic society is to observe L₂ literacy keeping in mind several parameters.
George Elwert differentiates basic literacy as the ability to read and write and functional literacy as useful literacy. “When programs for the development of literacy concentrate primarily upon the communication of one body or type of information, they may be termed programs for functional literacy. This includes functional literacy in the sense employed by UNESCO (1973), which combines literacy with instruction in simple technical skills, especially in agriculture” (in Olson & Torrance 2001:55). When applied to the field of language education, we can take the example of a technical skill through form focusing. For example, instilling the habit of present/present continuous tense usage through paragraph writing in one’s daily activity.

Writing happens only when the disadvantaged learner is asked to do it. For the disadvantaged learner in the classroom, it is need-based in terms of social and occupational mobility. In informal discussions with several earlier batches of students over a span of 25 years’ of teaching, it was observed that learners were desirous of improving their L2 writing skills.

There were difficulties to be overcome by the teacher as well as the learner. The learning time for L2 writing was limited. There were limited uses of L2 writing in out-of-school contexts. There was almost zero occurrence of L2 writing in the family background. But the classroom learners had an earnest desire to write in L2. The samples discussed in Chapter IV present an honest, brave effort
despite the difficulties discussed above. Another difficulty was that the learners could not spare time outside college hours as they had to travel back home for long distances up to 40 to 50 kms either by bus or train. The commuting took away 5 hours of the day. They preferred to attend language classes regularly provided the teacher was able to sustain their motivation through meaningful tasks, which would help in increasing their confidence to write in L2. This was the basis for the planning of the main study.

3.11 The research issues

The main issue that emerged from the 110 samples of preliminary study was that the L2 content matter is comprehensible and meaningful. There is evidence of "threshold level of linguistic competence" and "comprehensible output" (Cummins and Swain, 1986) which, in terms of L2 writing may be called functional literacy.

The disadvantaged learner in the classroom can be helped more in terms of identifying his L2 language abilities than the assessment of L2 writing in examinations. The need then arises about the recognition of his language abilities. Functional literacy, which relates the disadvantaged learners' L2 language abilities to his L2 performance is necessary for the above recognition. The theoretical concerns of functional literacy have been discussed in Chapter II. The criteria for identifying and recognizing functional literacy in L2 involved an examination of
the concept, the problem, the procedure adopted for the study and the method of data collection.

1. Concept

The term functional literacy is used because it helps capture the strong need to write in L2 despite a speaking or reading deficient environment. Functional literacy enables the communication process despite some problems in usage. This term helps to capture the written communication of L2 disadvantaged learners who suffer from a poor academic environment and the need for longer periods of learning time. Yet, they measure up to an immediate need for writing.

2. Problem

The identified problem was that learners’ L2 writing had communication potential but lacked grammatical and, sometimes, lexical appropriacy. Lexical inappropriacy features as wrong spelling or a new word for something that is already known to them.

3. Procedure

One class of learners was identified to probe into the problem deeply. The teacher gave discrete tasks. The written task was paragraph composition which had to be completed within a specified time.
Discrete tasks were given to ensure the participation of learners’ writing as they easily find excuses not to write though they express a motivation to write and the teacher tries to sustain or build interest into the task of writing.

4. Data collection

The learners were from the same class throughout the main study. The sample size varies due to several, uncontrollable, extraneous conditions. The data was collected over one academic term or a period of three months. During the data collection, it was observed that the grammar and composition classes of the II year learners are the last stage in formal education to learn L₂. It is the teacher, the classroom and the peer group that every learner has as resources to improve his L₂ literacy which, the present study argues can be recognized as functional literacy.

3.12 The research question for the main study

The issues that emerged from the preliminary study helped us to reformulate the central research question of this study, namely: how can one use a functional literacy framework to describe the L₂ literacy of the disadvantaged learner. This involved an engagement with the following specific questions:
1. Examination of the concept of functional literacy and the L₂ literacy of the learner.
2. Importance of recognising the L₂ literacy of the disadvantaged learner.
3. Examination of tasks and the writing of the disadvantaged learner to distinguish features of literacy.
4. Providing a framework of functional literacy to describe the L₂ literacy of the learner.

3.13 Research procedure for the main study

Since the present study necessitated a comprehensive instruction and interaction time with the learners, therefore, it was decided to look at five important aspects in order to adopt the necessary ethnographic approach to the study.

1. The time available for the composition classes in an academic year. One academic term of three and a half months was decided upon. The time of the year was also important. In the present context that is a representation of several other similar institutions, students attend classes regularly from July to September and December. October is a month of festival holidays, vacation and examinations. Students coming from long distances stop coming to college by mid-September as they are
preparing for the examinations or helping parents at home for the festivals or the cultivation of winter crops. They begin coming by mid-November and attend regularly till the end of December.

2. The use of $L_1$ as resource for task completion. This is the language that all learners bring into the classroom. Atkinson (1987:242) advocates the “judicious use of mother tongue”. It is also a valuable ‘humanistic’ (Stevick:1987) element in the classroom because it helps to build a rapport between the teacher and learner, which, in turn, effects success in terms of completing the task in the given time. Atkinson’s view (ibid: 245) that “learners often need to be made aware of how much they in fact can do with the limited corpus of language they possess” is relevant in terms of the $L_2$ functional literacy that they show in their writing.

3. The decision to have a task-based program for the academic term. Learners had already expressed their inclination towards this kind of an interaction. The task-based approach is “communicatively oriented” (Littlewood, 2004:326). Murphy (2003) says that if learners can see that the tasks are relevant to their own learning needs, then they will show an “achievement orientation” (ibid: 353). Skehan (2002:291) talks of the way second language acquisition suggests that language development
involves the growth of an inter language..." (Ellis, 2003:5) says that "while a task requires a learner to act primarily as a language user and give focal attention to message conveyance, it allows for peripheral attention to be paid to deciding what forms to use. "Nunan (1989:11) says that the "task is a piece of meaning-focused work involving learners in comprehending, producing and/or interacting in the target language, and that tasks are analysed or categorized according to their goals, input data, activities, settings and roles". Tasks are an important feature of L2 learning. Tasks are activities where production of language is mandatory. In L2 writing, task-based activities engage learners in a quick way as tasks are governed by time limits and are focused exercises for thinking. Task has been defined by several writers in research and pedagogic literatures, Breen (1989), Long (1985), Richards, Platt and Weber (1985), Crookes (1986), Prabhu (1987), Nunan (1989), Skehan (1996), Lee (2000), Bygate, Skehan and Swain (2001), Samuda (2001).

4. Decisions in choosing the topics for the research study were made keeping the ensuing annual examination in mind. The criteria for choosing the topics were essential as these helped in identifying certain ground realities that a L2 teacher needs to remember to get the learners begin writing in the classroom.
The criteria therefore had to take care of motivation levels and familiarity of the topic, which will result in a writing activity.

5. Quick writing as a technique was chosen because it allows the learner to concentrate on content, not worry about form, and writing without stopping. It encourages second language learners to think in the target language, because there is not enough time to think in the L₁ and then translate. (Lane and Perrin, 1984; in Jacobs, 1986:284). Also, quick writing should not be graded or marked. (Jacobs, 1986:285).

3.14 Purpose of task based writing

The second year composition syllabus is task-based at the final examination. Therefore, keeping the end writing situation in view, it was decided to make the learners do the tasks in a given period of time. This literacy based activity would help the learners increase their confidence in writing in L₂ by the time they sit for the final examination.

The communicative potential of the learner becomes evident through L₂ literacy. As meaning is achieved despite lexical and grammatical inappropriacies, it is evident that when learners get down to write, they try to use their limited resources of language for a wide range of thoughts. (Atkinson:1987; Jacobs:1986). Evidence of their thinking is observable in translation tasks from L₁
to L2 where learners stretch the meanings of words in L2 to capture their thoughts as presented in L1. The learner does not turn away from translation for inadequacy of vocabulary. He is perhaps left with a realization that the momentary elasticity of meaning for a given word has to be replaced by a better choice of word. Task-based writing ability as it develops is to some extent proof that language acquisition has happened. Primarily because writing like speaking is production of language. Writing activates acquisition. L2 writing represents the L2 literacy of the learner in bilingual contexts and, especially, with the disadvantaged learner. With regard to L1, writing may not be so essential because speaking satisfies most communication needs. However, with regard to L2, writing is an imposed, social need, which has to be met with despite the fact that speaking in L2 is not so essential in a bilingual situation. Therefore, task-based L2 literacy activities to seek evidence for L2 functional literacy of the disadvantaged learners are helpful. As Ruth Wajnryb (1992: 8) observes it is “...a convenient means of collecting data that frees the observer from forming an opinion or making an on-the-spot evaluation during the lesson. The judgmental and interpretive side comes later, after the lesson, and will be based on the complete data that has been collected”.

3.14.1 Assumptions for giving tasks to the learners

The objective for task-based writing has already been discussed in the preceding section. Other assumptions are that,
1. The learners are able to focus on writing which will help them build up the need for concentrating on a real-time task outside the classroom.

2. Familiar topics for the tasks helps them generate ideas faster because they have the scope of writing on a subject that they know something about.

3. Visuals stimulate the learner’s interest. Cartoons, visuals from newspaper which they could see in the college library quite often are almost daily can be brought into the classroom.

4. The translation tasks make the learner understand that thinking can be done either through L₁ or L₂ and, they could use this technique frequently in real-time tasks.

5. The learners’ confidence would be incrementally increased when they know that task completion was achieved in limited time. This will induce deeper motivation to learn and use L₂.

6. The learner is able to do a lot of lexical processing though there may be structural and organizational deficits in writing.

3.15 Task design for the study

The tasks have been designed with the following criteria in mind.

1. Reasons for choosing the task.

2. Task demands

3. Sample study
It was felt that the choice of the task had to follow certain reasons such as learner’s motivation to write on a particular topic, learner’s interest level for completion of the task, or, a topic, which is acceptable to all learners so that they eventually write in the class hour. The demands of the task were meant to check the comprehension level of the topic, the range of vocabulary that the learner uses and the ways in which the learner develops his ideas. Sometimes, it is necessary to reach a consensus over the ideas.

The sample study for the tasks varied because of many uncontrollable variables during the academic term such as public transport on strike, heavy rain, student demonstrations or protests over some issues related to their scholarships or attendance, unexpected interruptions in the teaching schedule due to sudden programmes like speeches for political causes and disturbances in the family environment of the learners.

3.15.1 Description of the tasks

Eight tasks were selected for the main study. The topics in the writing syllabus prescribed by the university as the syllabus for the undergraduate program were used for the study. The tasks were graded in such a manner that they move from exposition of the learners’ knowledge. The topics begin with experiential conditions, move to learners’ awareness of the world outside, and the way they relate to it, where the learners’ reading of pictures in newspapers and
observing things on their way to college or home becomes important. The activities include 2 translation tasks to make use of the learner’s L₁ as a resource for the processing of L₂ knowledge. The tasks move further to the creative and imaginative level. The last task demands a lot of written output in terms of the practice that they have had, which is supported by topic familiarity.

The grading of the tasks was done to elicit familiar knowledge, to observe learners’ use of two languages through tasks, which have interest value such as stories. Then a slightly, unfamiliar topic but which still had the support of observation was given. The final task was graded thus to observe whether familiarity of the topic combined with writing practice had helped in increasing their L₂ written output in limited time with the features of functional literacy already discussed in Chapters I (section 1.13) and II (sections 2.6.2 and 2.9).

As already reported eight tasks were used for the main study. The details are given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Nature of task</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task 1</td>
<td>Paragraph writing</td>
<td>Holidays</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 2</td>
<td>Paragraph writing</td>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 3</td>
<td>Paragraph/Essay writing</td>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 4</td>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>Supermarkets</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 5</td>
<td>Paragraph writing</td>
<td>Translation of story from L₂ to L₁</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 6</td>
<td>Paragraph writing</td>
<td>Translation of story from L₁ to L₂</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 7</td>
<td>Paragraph writing</td>
<td>Old age</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task 8</td>
<td>Paragraph writing</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tasks 1 to 8 were set up for the research study. The 8 tasks were given to the students over a period of 3 months. In a time-bound, fixed, term-wise academic program in which learners coped with their elective subjects, practical sessions in laboratories, learning of Telugu/Sanskrit/Hindi/Urdu, it was heartening to see the learners showing sustained interest in the L₂ writing classes. The task difficulty was designed to elicit the experiences of the learners, which, in turn, they could talk about and, therefore, had to write about in L₂. For example, holidays the first topic is experiential. Terrorism, the second topic, is a current topic which they hear on the radio, television, reports from others, reading in the newspapers etc. In the third task, looking at a visual activates their imagination. Pictures arouse certain images, in the minds of the people. The images may be similar or different. The picture helps in establishing the cognitive strategies that the learners use in understanding the connections in the picture. A study of the strategies could be taken up for observation later. The picture given to the learner is sequential but imagination of the learner can bring in different conclusions. With the help of cognitive strategies, and "individual differences" (Skehan, 1982) such as motivation apparent in imagination, the learners may display some common characteristics as well as specific. The ultimate aim of the task is attempt at communication without being given any linguistic cues. Perhaps, the learner may be composing his ideas in L₁ and the word order or syntax in L₂ may be a literal translation from L₁. The objective of the task is to examine whether it happens and to what extent the learner succeeds in communication. The fourth
task on report writing is to look at writing which has evidence of the learner’s observation of the world outside. The translation tasks help them to write faster in two languages within a limited time through the syntax of the L₁ and L₂ are different. O’Neill (1998:2) says that “the syntax of the L₂ is not acquired unconsciously, or at least not in the way L₁ syntax is acquired. Few L₂ learners develop the same degree of unconscious rule-governed insight into and use of the L₂ which they demonstrate with the L₁.” The difficulty is in the choice of lexis in translation tasks. Task five, translation of story from L₂ to L₁ has not been analysed. The time insufficient for learners to read the L₂ story, comprehend and translate it into L₁ completely. Translation from L₂ to L₁ is not required for the examination. Task six, translation of story from L₁ to L₂ has been analysed because learners completed reading the L₁ story quickly. Their comprehension was quick and they could complete the translation into L₂ within the stipulated time. Tasks seven and eight are experiential writing for which the learners can recall their experiences easily. These tasks save time over thinking and the learner can begin writing a little early in the classroom hour. For the task on Old age, the learners’ experiences with their grand parents maybe useful. The last topic summer is given to check what their lexical range is in describing the sun’s heat or look for the number of ideas that may differ from each other.
3.16 Sampling

The sample collection was done at random. The constant feature was that the teacher-researcher met the students of the same class for all the tasks. The sample size varies from one task to another because of certain uncontrollable variables like irregular attendance of students, afternoon class-hours and unexpected changes in the time-table.

3.17 Research tools for the study

1. The 8 tasks selected for the main study provided the activity base.

2. Bell’s framework (1993) of “User”, “Process”, “Text” and “society” served as a descriptor for the learners’ samples. Bell’s framework based on her reading of writers like Olson (1986), Freire and Macedo (1987), and Heath (1983) helped to make the connections between Bell’s terminology and the evidence of the terminological implications in the disadvantaged learners’ samples.

3. Atkinson’s (1987) emphasis on the development of useful learning strategies are also considered because they “need to find a way of expressing their meaning within the limits of their competence in the target language”. (ibid: 245). Atkinson formulates a framework consisting of 3 columns – “students wished to express”, “English used by the student” and the “strategy”. Atkinson also emphasizes the use of translation which helps in promoting guessing strategies.
For examples, in some random samples of the learners, there are sentences like:

The festival come beginning the year and people are new ideas and new aim.

According to Bell’s framework, the “text” (the sentence) undergoes the “process” of reading and writing in a “society” which has a shared context. The learner who is the “user” of the “text” wishes to say that a festival which comes at the beginning of the year makes people get new ideas and work with new vigour for the realization of their aims.

According to Atkinson’s (1987) framework the above task can be analysed in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student wished to express</th>
<th>English used</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The festival at the beginning of the year</td>
<td>The festival came beginning the year and people are new ideas and new aim</td>
<td>Using simple verbs, dropping prepositions, noun phrases or prepositional phrases-ellipsis in usage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Informal discussions with the learners helped the teacher-researcher to carry out the main study with 8 tasks with a particular design of 3 steps, namely, criteria for choosing the topic, task demands and sample study. The teacher researcher attempted a comprehensive study of the samples of the 8 tasks. Bell’s and Atkinson’s framework were used as descriptions. The emphasis lay on comprehensive sample study with all the samples of every task being observed and analysed. A description of 4 learners who did more tasks out of the 8 than the rest of the class has also been made. This helped us in determining the common features of functional literacy. The use of L₁, translations, communicative potential which served as parameters to understand the potential of learners’ L₂ writing helped us to understand further the validity of the term functional literacy as a descriptor for their L₂ writing abilities.

3.18 Bell’s (1993) framework to find the commonplaces of literacy

In her paper, “Finding the commonplaces of literacy”. Bell talks about the multidisciplinary nature of the literature on literacy. Commonplaces, says Bell have their roots in Aristotle’s “Topica”. They are the set of fundamental elements that are essential to any complete description of a topic.
Bell began with a working hypothesis called Agent, Society, Text and Differentiation. After a great deal of rethinking, she arrives at the final selection of commonplaces. These four commonplaces help him to find the common ground in arguments from a variety of academic backgrounds. The terms also help us to explore the relationships between apparently different positions. She demonstrates the value of the commonplaces by using them to explore and express the common ground in the arguments of Olson, Freire and Heath. She changes the terms of the commonplaces of literacy to User, Text, Society and Process. While ‘User’, ‘text’ and ‘society’ somewhat mean the same for the Olson, Freire and Heath, the differences lie in who places more emphasis on what term.

In the main study, Bell’s terminology has been used to interpret the data in the following way:

‘User’ is the disadvantaged learner to uses L₂ as a result of social and educational factors.

‘Text’ is the data or the piece of language that is produced by the disadvantaged learner.

‘Society’ and ‘Process’ are factors which relate to the disadvantaged learner’s understanding of his needs in the world in which he lives and the ways in which he makes a communicative effort in L₂ so that he can relate himself to the world around him.
The following table will help us understand the terms for each writer better as deducted from Bell’s study. For the researcher’s main study, Bell’s (1993) and Atkinson’s (1987) terminologies have been combined to analyse the data.

Bell’s Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer studied by Bell</th>
<th>Agent/User</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olson – (The cognitive consequences of literacy – 1986)</td>
<td>Affected by the process of exposure to text – individual</td>
<td>Piece of language – the world in which the User lives</td>
<td>Change in user shapes the kind of society in which user lives</td>
<td>A cognitive mechanism that allows for conceptual development for the User</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freire (Literacy: Reading the word and world (Freire and Macedo, 1987)</td>
<td>Affected by the process of exposure to text – people, learners, illiterate, disadvantaged, majority, oppressed; therefore, a group</td>
<td>The general milieu in which learners travel</td>
<td>Relationship of learners to the world, mediated by the transforming practice of this world</td>
<td>Development of User’s political ability to see himself as an agent within the world, shaping and being shaped by that world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heath (Ways with words, 1983)</td>
<td>Specific people; Trackton and Roadville communities; particularly children -the community -society affects user directly</td>
<td>Any piece of written material that can yield meaning</td>
<td>The community shapes the process by which users interact with text</td>
<td>Socialization practice of literacy is idiosyncratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above terminology by Bell with the backdrop of study of 3 representative writers – Heath, Olson, Freire on literacy helps us to analyse the data of disadvantaged learner in the classroom who is the Agent/user, affected by the L2 around him in the bilingual society in which he lives with a process of interaction between society, the educational institutions, his own needs and aspirations and the expectations of the employment market outside the classroom.

Bell (1993:151) says that “literacy is interacting with a text within a certain context”. We will find the disadvantaged learner in the classroom interacting with his exposure to the world, through L2 in his writing tasks. With Bell’s framework as support, this study attempts to explain that the socially and economically disadvantaged learner’s literacy in L2 is not a binary opposite to illiteracy in L2. Yet, their L2 literacy is different from L1 literacy. L1 literacy is acquired through L1 oracy. But L2 literacy is not acquired through L2 oracy to the extent as L1 literacy. L2 oracy features may be sparse, deficient, but are to some extent, ubiquitous. L2 oracy is passive in the collective psyche of the community. A compulsion to become a L2 user is intense. Whatever is learnt is learnt inspite of several shortcomings and poor-learning environments. Grammar and vocabulary are identified as the core of L2. These two features are given a lot of importance by the examination system and a large section of language teachers who are norm supporters. Blind arguments for fluency proficiency, proficiency create disadvantages for many learners. Language education needs to have the human rights perspective and larger educational goals, which will accommodate
functional literacy. For the disadvantaged learners, functional literacy is an encouraging beginning which will sustain his interest in improving grammar and vocabulary and thus, eventually, he also moves towards the norm. It needs to be understood by teachers that norm orientation can be favourable to disadvantaged learners if their functional literacy is considered to be an “interlangauge” (Selinker, 1972) or “basic interpersonal communication skills” (Cummins, 1981). With proper understanding from the larger L2 user group, the disadvantaged learner can move towards proficiency and fluency.

3.19 Procedure for data analysis

The procedure used for data analysis was one of examining written samples of the disadvantaged learner in the classroom. Data from 8 writing tasks in the classroom was collected to interpret the results of this study. This was done with the help of student-teacher interaction in the classroom, teacher’s observation, the selection of tasks to examine the disadvantaged learners’ L2 writing in terms of functional literacy. At the end of eight tasks, an overall analysis of four learners who attempted maximum number of tasks was also made.

Bell’s (1993) framework helped in understanding the learners’ L2 writing as a negotiating activity between the reader, the learner as writer and the society which helps him in the process of writing. An understanding of the disadvantaged learner’s home, academic environment as described in the earlier sections of
Chapter III (section 3.7.1 to 3.7.1.4) would enable us to read the learner’s writing in L₂. Atkinson’s (1987) framework enables us to see the strategies that the learner may have used while writing within a limited time. Some of the strategies that the learner may have used are in terms of vocabulary, spellings and a few grammatical features which could be found in L₁ structure.

3.20 Conclusion

The relevant data to address the research question of this study of the 8 tasks was collected from the under-graduate second year class of disadvantaged learners in an aided institution. In the following chapter, the analysis and interpretation of data would help us find directions for the feasibility of using a functional literacy framework to describe the L₂ literacy of the disadvantaged learner.