Chapter 1
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Introduction and Scope of the Study

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Although the cultural oneness of India goes back to thousands of years, its political unity as a nation-state is of much more recent origin. English has played a crucial role in forging that unity. It continues to do so, perhaps, more than any Indian language does. The process has, by now, gone so far that it is doubtful if the importance and necessity of English in national affairs can ever be eliminated or diminished. In a certain sense "English may be called a world language and English is our most effective means of contact with the outside world" (Nagpur Report 41), that is, it provides "the most valuable access to what is being said, felt, thought and created" (Abraham in Times of India) in different countries of the world. What is more, English is the official language of some North-Eastern states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, whatever its constitutional status, the need for English will not disappear or even diminish. It will still be the only effective link language of the entire country because of its acceptability to all states and regions and for that
very reason it will also remain the language of pan-Indian discourse. Therefore, the importance of the teaching and learning of English can never be over-emphasized. In the words of the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948):

English however must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature — humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental urges we should give up English, we would cut ourselves from the living stream of ever-growing knowledge ... and in the universities no student should be allowed to take a degree who does not acquire the ability to read with facility and understanding works of English authors. (Qtd. in Barua 6)

1.1 Rationale for the present study

The present study is prompted by the following considerations:

There has been a steep decline in the standard of both teaching and learning of English in Assam which is evident from the high rate of failure, particularly, in General English papers at the Higher Secondary Certificate (H.S.C., that is, +2) and Three Year Degree
Course (T.D.C.) examinations. Although English is not the official language of Assam or the medium of instruction up to undergraduate level it is, nonetheless, used widely in official communication and inter-state correspondence. English still plays a vital role in trade and commerce. In the field of education textbooks and allied teaching materials in science, technology and commerce are mostly available in the English language. Although in humanities some textbooks are available in Assamese, reference books written in English are a must for the students. On the whole, the English language plays an important role in the development and progress of Assam in different fields like political, social, economic, commercial and educational.

It is, therefore, imperative to improve the standard of teaching and learning of English in the State by removing the impediments that may be coming on the way. We are undertaking this study to find out some of the causes of the prevailing dismal situation in Assam in the field of teaching and learning of English and to recommend possible remedial measures.

1.2 Statement of the problem

English is taught as a second language in schools and
colleges in India including Assam. In Assam the learners start learning this language from Class V. They spend six academic years in learning English up to Class X, that is, the end of high school course, with controlled vocabulary and controlled grammatical structures. At the higher secondary and undergraduate levels, that is, at the plus two (+2) and the Three Year Degree Course (T.D.C.) stages of the 10+2+3 system of education the textbooks for General English papers in Assam are written with vocabulary and grammatical structures over which there is mostly no technical control or limitation. Whereas simplified texts are used in courses up to the high school level, mostly original and unabridged writings of authors whether a short story, an essay, a novel, a drama or a poem, are prescribed for higher secondary and undergraduate students. But the higher secondary and undergraduate students find their textbooks in English difficult to understand. As a result, every year a large number of students fail in English at their final examinations. We assume that if textbooks in General English are written keeping in view the needs and abilities of the students in Assam the aims and objectives of the syllabuses will surely be fulfilled and students will surely learn English well and become proficient in it.
1.2.1 Hypotheses and assumptions

The present study is based on the following hypotheses and assumptions. This research is undertaken to find empirical evidences to prove and build upon them. The hypotheses and assumptions are:

a. The aims and objectives with which the textbooks in General English papers for higher secondary and Three Year Degree Courses in arts, science and commerce are written in Assam have not been fulfilled.

b. The textbooks in General English papers are not written keeping in view the needs and abilities of learners. In other words, the textbooks in General English have ignored the actual needs and abilities (ground realities) of learners in Assam.

c. The textbooks in General English papers give more stress on appreciating English literature than on learning the language.

d. The textbooks in General English papers are not so designed as to impart language-learning skills effectively. As a result, they become unsuitable tools of teaching the English language even in the hand of a good teacher.
If the textbooks and allied teaching materials in General English papers are well-designed keeping in view the actual needs and ability of learners, effective learning will surely take place and the percentage of successful candidates in final examinations will surely be satisfactory.

1.2.2 Scope of the study

The present study aims at analysing the textbooks and allied teaching materials in General English papers at the higher secondary (+2) and Three Year Degree Course (T.D.C.) stages in arts, science and commerce in Assam with a view to finding their suitability or otherwise for the present needs of Assamese students. The prescribed courses of study, textbooks, reference books, question papers set in the examinations and teacher's handbooks at the higher secondary and T.D.C. levels will be taken for analysis and evaluation. Textbooks in General English papers at the higher secondary level are same for students of all arts, science and commerce streams. The syllabus-framer and examining body is Assam Higher Secondary Education Council. At the T.D.C. level the two general universities, Dibrugarh and Gauhati, are syllabus-framers and examining bodies
separately for the students of colleges affiliated to each of them in all the three streams. The prescribed courses of study, textbooks, reference books, question papers and teacher's handbooks in General English papers in all the three streams of both the universities will be taken for analysis and evaluation.

First, the needs for English of the students of Assam will be ascertained through a questionnaire administered to them. Then courses of study will be analysed to find whether they are framed so as to meet the present needs of the students. Passages and exercises in the prescribed textbooks, the teacher's handbooks, the reference books and the question papers set in final examinations will be analysed to find whether they meet the demands stated under the Aims and Objectives of the courses of study.

For our analysis of textbooks we will take the following five broad parameters. They are: vocabulary, grammar, thought content, cultural points and interest value. We will take into account the suggestions of students on how to improve or modify the prescribed textbooks and allied teaching materials. For this purpose a second questionnaire will be administered to students. The third questionnaire will be administered
to the teachers of English in higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges to find out their awareness of the present state of teaching and learning of English at the higher secondary and T.D.C. levels in Assam; their awareness of the relevant materials evolved at the national level for the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language; and their suggestions for the improvement and modification of the prescribed textbooks made on the basis of their experience.

When recommending remedial measures to make the present textbooks in General English papers suitable for the learning purpose of students in Assam we will take into account the suggestions of both the students and teachers besides our own observation and study of teaching and learning programmes and materials like classroom teaching and students' responses; question papers and answer scripts; interviews with teachers of English, textbook writers and educational administrators; and views of the educated elite expressed through newspaper columns.

1.2.3 Reasons for selecting the State of Assam

We have selected the State of Assam for the present study for the following reasons:
The researcher works as a college teacher in Assam. He is well-aquainted with the teaching and learning programmes and materials used at the higher secondary and T.D.C. levels in the State. It will be convenient for him to draw on his experience. He wants to contribute to the improvement of the present dismal situation in teaching English at the higher secondary and T.D.C. stages. Moreover, as he works in Assam it will be easier for him to collect relevant data from students, teachers and others concerned in the State.

1.2.4 Choice of the three general streams

We have selected only the three general streams of arts, science and commerce, and not vocational, technological or specialized streams of study for obvious reasons. The proficiency in English required for a student in the above three general streams is a class by itself. In vocational, technological and specialized streams of study the proficiency in English required may be different. In fact, in English Language Teaching (ELT) there are materials designed to suit the needs of such courses called English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Moreover, if the vocational, technological and specialized streams are included in the study the field will be unmanageably broad to be covered by the researcher single-handedly.
1.2.5 Choice of higher secondary and T.D.C. stages

The present study takes into account the textbooks and allied teaching materials in General English papers at the higher secondary and T.D.C. stages. High school course is over at the end of Class X. Up to this point the textbooks in General English papers are written with controlled vocabulary and controlled grammatical structures. Lessons are graded and arranged in the ascending order of difficulty. In most cases lessons are written in simplified English after being adapted from the original writings of English authors. But in most of the higher secondary and T.D.C. textbooks in General English papers the vocabulary and grammatical structures are not under any technical control. The original writings of the native speakers of English are included in the prescribed textbooks. The quantum of course content in the higher secondary or Three Year Degree Courses is more than that at the high school stage. So both the higher secondary and T.D.C. stages may be called the post-high school level. The entry point of the higher secondary level is, therefore, a clear-cut demarcation between the two different types of courses of study.
Moreover, the post-high school level of education in Assam differs in many ways from the high school level. In the latter the number of students in one class is far less than the number of students in either higher secondary or T.D.C. stages. In a class in high schools the maximum number of students may be only eighty. On the other hand, the average number of students in a class at higher secondary and undergraduate levels is 250. So, as far as classroom management and written assignments are concerned there is bound to be a marked difference between the two teaching situations. This difference in classroom situations has a very important role to play, particularly, in the teaching and learning of English. Having considered all the above points we choose for our study both the higher secondary (+2) and T.D.C. stages combinedly which may be called the post-high school level.

1.3 Broad framework of the study

The present study will first try to find out Assamese students' needs for English from themselves. Secondly, views of both students and teachers of English will be sought regarding the suitability and effectiveness of present textbooks in General English papers and allied teaching materials and programmes. An attempt will be
made to ascertain the awareness of the teachers of English at higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges regarding the developments in ELT materials. The views of both students and teachers of English will be taken into account when suggesting improvement in the present textbooks and allied teaching materials and programmes. Recommendations will be made for the improvement, modifications, additions or change in the present textbooks and allied teaching materials and programmes on the basis of their suitability and effectiveness in fulfilling the needs of the Assamese students. The needs will have been ascertained earlier from an investigation into the views of students and teachers; interviews with the educated elite; and our observation of the teaching and learning in classrooms in the State in general.

1.4 Instruments and the procedure to be followed

Three sets of questionnaires have been designed to collect data from students and teachers of English. First two sets are for students. One set is so designed as to ascertain the students' own perception of their needs for English. The other set is designed to secure students' views as to how to improve the textbooks in English to make them suitable and more effective for
their learning purpose. The third set of questionnaire seeks to find out the general awareness of an average teacher of English with regard to the materials available in the field of teaching of English as a second language. It also seeks the views of teachers of English as to how the present textbooks and allied teaching materials can be improved in order to make them suitable and effective for fulfilling the needs of the students in Assam.

Three short schedules are framed for observation of classroom and social situations; and for interviews.

In developing the above instruments we have taken the help of the model used by Mahajiteswar Das, a former researcher in the field of ELT. The instruments designed by us can be used by future researchers too.

The written questionnaires will be given to students and teachers of English in several higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges all over Assam. We will observe the teaching of English in classrooms in some higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges. We will observe social intercourses and note the use of English in them. We will take interviews of the educated elite and the people connected with education in the society and will
write down their views regarding the teaching and learning of English in the State.

Responses to the questionnaires, notes from observation of classroom teaching and social intercourses; and views of interviewees will be compiled and an average will be worked out to arrive at the final resultant picture of the teaching and learning of English in Assam on the basis of which we will recommend remedial measures.

1.4.1 Description of questionnaires

The first questionnaire which seeks to ascertain the Assamese students' needs for English contains 51 queries. The queries cover a wide range of areas in which students may be required to use the English language. Broadly, they are under four categories - listening, speaking, reading and writing. Areas like listening to radio and TV programmes, following classroom lectures and speeches or talks of a person speaking English are included under listening. Putting questions to the teacher in the classroom, talking with teachers, friends, family members, government and non-government officials and persons outside the State are covered under speaking. Reading books, magazines, newspapers and official correspondences come under the third
category, reading. Writing includes the writing of classroom assignments, answering questions in examinations, corresponding with people outside the State or those who do not know Assamese and the writing of official letters.

Besides the above four categories of questions the degree of students' willingness or motivation for learning and studying the English language is ascertained through a series of suggested reasons.

The questionnaire also seeks to find from the Bachelor's and Master's degree-holders and the present postgraduate students whether they have been facing a sense of inadequacy owing to their insufficient knowledge of English in different spheres of their life.

The second questionnaire has only seven queries. It tries to find out the students' perception of the difficulty level of the prescribed textbooks. There are also questions to elicit students' suggestions for turning the textbooks and allied teaching materials into suitable and effective tools for their learning purpose.

The third questionnaire contains 32 items. The questions seek to find out the general awareness of an average teacher of English with regard to the developments in the teaching of English in India in
general and in Assam in particular. Some questions are designed to elicit teachers' responses as to the difficulty level of present textbooks in General English papers. The last part of the questionnaire invites suggestions from the teachers for improving and modifying the present textbooks and allied teaching materials in order to make effective learning possible.

1.4.2 The total sample

A total of 134 students studying in both higher secondary and T.D.C. classes in Arts, Science and Commerce streams all over Assam will be given questionnaires and their responses collected. These students will be chosen from 26 higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges situated in different parts of Assam so as to form a cross-section of the entire student community at the higher secondary and T.D.C. stages in the State. Colleges will be so selected as to cover the students of both Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities.

A total of 21 teachers of English teaching at 15 higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges all over Assam will be given questionnaires and their responses collected. The teachers will be so selected as to form a cross-section of the entire population of the teachers of English all over Assam.
1.4.3 Pretesting of questionnaires

First we administered the three sets of questionnaires in Sarupathar College. Ten students and two teachers were given them to see if they could respond spontaneously. All the ten students needed some explanation regarding several items in the questionnaires. Sometimes, we had to explain them in their mother tongue, Assamese. But the two teachers gave their responses without any hesitation. Both of them needed only a brief explanation regarding the purpose of the research.

So we presume that all the students surveyed will have needed some explanation or help to respond to the questionnaires. Some teachers will have needed some explanation too.

1.4.4 The pilot survey

The pilot survey conducted in 26 higher secondary schools and undergraduate colleges with 134 students and 21 teachers of English forming a cross-section of both the student and teacher communities shows that it has sufficient scope to find out the real picture of teaching and learning of English in Assam at the higher secondary and T.D.C. stages. But some respondents needed coaxing in order to give their responses and fill
up the questionnaires. The responses of both students and teachers are valuable in order to improve the present textbooks and allied teaching materials in English and to make them suitable and effective tools in teaching and learning the English language.

1.4.5 Schedules for interview and observation

Three sets of schedules have been designed for interview and observation of social activities and classroom teaching. Some data will be collected through these schedules which may not be possible with the help of questionnaires. From interviews and from our observation of classroom teaching and social situations, the Assamese society's needs for English will be ascertained.

Interviews will be taken with people connected with education and those who can be called conscious citizens in direct face-to-face contact, in social occasions and during informal chats. We will note down the relevant responses and opinions as the required data.

We will observe the use of English in the Assamese society in different situations like directly face-to-face with persons; during social and casual contacts; and during social and casual activities. We will also observe the use of English in written
materials used in the Assamese society like personal correspondences, official letters, insurance literature and advertisements on education, agriculture, industry and employment. We will note down the required data.

We will observe classroom teaching situations in five higher secondary schools and five colleges. We will note down the required data regarding the use of the English language in connection with the following points:

1. Teacher's method of teaching.
2. Response of students.
3. Interaction between the teacher and students.
4. Reading assignment.
5. Writing assignments given to students in the classroom.
6. Correction of written assignments and homework in the classroom.

1.4.6 Procedure to be followed for tabulating the data

The number of positive and negative responses will be calculated for each query in the three sets of questionnaires and the percentage will be found out for each item. These data along with the data obtained from interviews and from our observations will be taken into
account to arrive at a decisive conclusion on the basis of which we will make recommendations.

1.5 Usefulness of the study

The present study, we hope, will be useful in several respects. First, it will determine the Assamese students' needs for English. Secondly, it will find out the general awareness of an average teacher of English at the higher secondary and degree levels regarding developments in the teaching and learning programmes in India in general and in Assam in particular. Thirdly, the study will take into account the views of both students and teachers, who are directly involved in teaching and learning of English, with regard to framing syllabuses and preparing textbooks in General English papers. The analysis and evaluation of textbooks and allied teaching materials in General English papers will be made in the light of the students' perception of their needs for English. Recommendations for improvement of the textbooks in General English papers will be made to make the teaching and learning programmes effective so that the dismal situation prevailing in the field of teaching and learning of English as reflected in the high rate of failure in examinations can be improved. Fourthly, as the present study is the first of its kind in Assam the tools of
research evolved for the study may be used by future researchers for their purposes.

1.6 Limitation

The present study has its limitations. It takes the views of only 134 students from 26 higher secondary schools and degree colleges across the State to ascertain the needs for English of the entire student community in Assam. Although it is a cross-section of the student population in the State, the study is not all-encompassing because it does not take into account the views of one and all. The same type of limitation is faced when going to find out the general awareness of an average teacher of English by administering a questionnaire only to 21 teachers from 15 higher secondary schools and degree colleges. Further, we have taken only the higher secondary and undergraduate stages in general streams of arts, science and commerce and have excluded medical and technological streams from our study. Textbooks and allied teaching materials in General English papers have been selected for the present study, not those in English Honours (Major) papers.

A study to cover all the general, medical and technological streams and all the students and teachers
of English at the post-high school level in the entire State will have involved a lot of expenditure and time which we cannot afford. So the study has to be selective and limited. Nonetheless, the present study covers a cross-section of the students and teachers of English at the post-high school level. So it is useful. Findings and recommendations will be useful in preparing suitable and effective textbooks in General English for the higher secondary and Three Year Degree Courses in arts, science and commerce.

1.7 A survey of previous studies

No empirical study has been done in Assam to ascertain the Assamese students' needs for English and to analyse and evaluate textbooks and allied teaching materials and programmes at any of the stages — secondary, higher secondary, undergraduate or postgraduate course. However, a study has been done on the State of Orissa by Mahajiteswar Das at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad under the supervision of R.N. Ghosh. In Assam, only a study on error analysis has been done by Madan M. Sarma at Dibrugarh University under the supervision of Sunanda Datta. We briefly review both the studies below:

Das has taken seven occupational categories of personnel in Orissa for his study. They are: doctors, engineers, lawyers, high school teachers, bank clerks and cashiers, nurses, and pharmacists. He has administered questionnaires to a cross-section of them to find out their needs for English in their respective professions. He has also collected data through interviews and from his own observation.

The dissertation is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter introduces and describes the scope of the study. In the second and third chapters the spread of English education in India with special reference to Orissa both before and after Independence has been dealt with. Chapter four makes an assessment of the English language skills and job needs of the personnel belonging to seven occupational categories in the State of Orissa. It is followed by an assessment of the English language proficiency of those categories of people in chapter
five. In the sixth chapter an analysis of a field study among students is given in detail. Students' use of English both spoken and written in different situations has been taken note of along with their own estimate of the teaching programmes, usefulness of them and their difficulty level. Students' own perception of their industriousness to learn English has been noted down too. In chapter seven the English teaching programmes have been critically analysed in relation to the data from a field study conducted among specialist subject teachers and teachers of English. The eighth and last chapter carries conclusion and recommendations.

This study by Das was done in 1977. At that time he found the existing teaching programmes in English sufficient to meet the job needs of the seven occupational categories of personnel in Orissa. So he recommended that it was not necessary to offer specialized courses in English for the seven occupational categories of personnel separately. however, on the basis of some of his findings he suggested several changes in the Intermediate syllabus and in the English courses for B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com. students in Orissa. he also suggested certain changes in the textbooks and other teaching materials and the examination system.

Sarma has taken a sample of 207 Assamese learners at the higher secondary level for his study and found the following facts regarding their written English:

1. The learners make most of the errors in the use of verbs, tenses, passives, articles and prepositions and in verbs and tenses together (that is, when they are considered as elements of the verb phrase).

2. About 80 per cent of the errors in the use of articles result from omission and overuse of the definite article 'the'.

3. About 61 per cent of the errors in the use of prepositions involves substitution of some common prepositions such as 'in', 'on', 'for' and 'by'. Omission of prepositions in obligatory positions accounts for 27 per cent of the errors in prepositions.

4. Errors resulting from omission, substitution, and redundant use of the copula 'be' constitute more
than 73 per cent of the total errors in the use of verbs. Errors resulting from the addition of the copula 'be' to the main verb in non-progressive forms account for 58 per cent of the errors in the use of verbs.

5 A large number of errors in the tenses involve the violation of the tense agreement in complex sentences.

6 The errors of omission of the third person singular —s constitute more than 65 per cent of the total errors in the S-V concord.

7 The learners avoid the use of the passive form in 25 per cent of cases. More than 61 per cent of the errors in the use of the passive result from the learners' failure to distinguish between the active and passive forms. Incomplete application of rules for passivization accounts for 33 per cent of the errors.

8 The learners make a large number of errors in common words and structures which are taught to them at an earlier stage and which, according to the curriculum, should have been acquired in their early academic career. In a large number of cases errors result from infringement of general rules.
Sarma considers all the above type of errors made by Assamese learners as serious. He finds the following as the possible causes of errors:
(a) Language transfer; (b) False assumption about the L₂ system; (c) Ignorance of the relevant L₂ rules; (d) Ignorance of rule-restrictions; and (e) Teaching-learning situation.

He recommends the following measures for the improvement of the teaching of English at the higher secondary level:

The syllabus in English should have two interrelated components: (a) Grammatical or linguistic and (b) Communicative. The first year of the two year higher secondary course should be devoted to remedial teaching with a view to consolidating what was learnt at the secondary level. Reteaching of some areas of English grammar, introducing new words and extending the use of already known words should be emphasized. The second year should be devoted to the development of communicative skills, mainly, to the writing of various types.

1.8 Organization of the present study

We propose to arrange and divide our study into eight chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic of
research with the statement of its rationale and describes the scope of the study. The tools of research such as questionnaires and schedules for interview and observation have been described. Hypotheses and assumptions behind the research are given in this chapter too with a survey of previous works done in related fields and arguments for the usefulness of the present study. The chapter concludes with a glimpse of how the present research work will be undertaken and organized.

The second chapter will deal with English education in India both before and after Independence with special reference to Assam. In chapter three Assamese students' needs for English will be discussed and analysed. The views of both teachers and students regarding the difficulty level of prescribed textbooks and how to improve, modify and change them in order to turn them into suitable and effective tools of learning English will be discussed.

Chapters four, five, six and seven will make critical analyses and evaluation of textbooks and allied teaching materials in General English for higher secondary and Three Year Degree Courses in arts, science and commerce in the light of the data obtained from
field studies conducted among students and teachers and analysed in chapter three. Chapter eight will contain the conclusion and recommendations on the basis of our findings.