Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

“Language is the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols.” (Hall, 1968: 158).

Language is a social phenomenon, which has its principal function that of communication. Language is the most important means of communication through which the members of the society converse, transfer and create knowledge and pass on from one generation to the other. It seems that to convey an idea into the mind of other is to convey a sound into his ear. Thus, it can be said that imparting knowledge gets assimilated to a purely physical process.

Society does exist through a process of transmission, which occurs as a result of communication - of habits, of doing things, thinking and feeling from the older to younger generation, communication – of ideals, aims, hopes, beliefs, aspirations, opinions, standard and knowledge. Language, being the most important tool of communication manifests both in sounds and symbols. The development and enrichment of language occurs as a result of the new words, better expressions and vocabularies that are coined in the society.

1.2 English and Assamese: Common Origin

Regarding the origin and history of both English and Assamese, it is revealed that both the languages originated from the Indo-European group “the largest and well-defined genetic family which includes most of the languages of
Europe, past and present and extends across Iran to Northern half of the Indian subcontinent” (Bright : ed.1992; Vol - II).

According to Victoria Fromkin and Robert Rodman (1993), Indo-European family of language consists of nine sub-families of which English emerges from Germanic and Assamese emerges from Indo-Iranian group.

Kaliram Medhi (1988) also says, “The languages of all the earlier record of India, whether literary or inscriptionsal is Indo-European in character. That is to say it is related to Greek and Latin and to our English tongue and not to the earlier forms of speech which is supplanted in India.”

According to western philologists, Greek and Latin were the oldest languages indicating that there was a parent language from which all other languages emerged. Sir William Jones in 1786 asserted the common origin of the languages like Sanskrit and other modern European languages, explored that Sanskrit had to be related to Greek and Latin, and later on revealed that Sanskrit has elements that link to the parent in many more ways than either Greek or Latin. Besides, Sanskrit has a full-fledged lexical system that relates to the other languages in the Indo-European family.

The genetic relatedness of English and Assamese as the languages of the same parent can be diagrammatically shown as the following (Fromkin and Rodman, 1993):

![Diagram of Indo-European family of languages]
The fact that English and Assamese descended from the common Indo-European language makes us aware that some features are bound to be common to both the languages. Similarly, because of the fact that there is a gap of thousands of years after the separation of Sanskrit (from which Assamese descended) and primitive Germanic (from which English descended) some features of differences are also bound to happen. Though both the languages belong to the same Indo-European family, they developed differently at two distant places over the centuries. The structures of both English and Assamese are different. It becomes a problem to study the English language and its implication for Assamese learners in context of second-language scenario since the negative transfer of the Assamese language does exist in learning the structure of the English language.

1.2.1 English Language

English occupies the unique position of being the language used by the largest number of people in the world. David Crystal (1985: 7-9) provides an optimistic estimated figure of 2 billion users of English. He says, “...if you are highly conscious of international standards, or wish to keep the figures for world English down, you will opt for a total of around 700 million in the mid 1980s. If you go to the opposite extreme and allow in any systematic awareness whether in speaking, listening, reading or writing, you could easily persuade yourself of the reasonableness of 2 billion.”

It is the national language of a number of countries such as United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. English having the status of international language, is commonly accepted that the label ‘English’ can be applied to many varieties of languages which are identifiably different from each other: “British English”, “American
English”, “Australian English”, “Indian English” etc. English, being a world language is spoken differently in different parts of the world.

Throughout England, a great diversity of pronunciation exists among the people of different regions and communities; still a particular regional accent that is the standard dialect spoken by educated people in Southern parts of London has acquired a social prestige. This dialect is known as Received Pronunciation (RP) which is popularly referred to as B.B.C English or Standard English.

1.2.2 Assamese Language

Assamese enjoys the status of primary and official language of Assam. Regarding the origin of the Assamese language, it has been an established fact that Assamese is a descendant of Magadhan group of the Indo-Aryan family of languages. In the words of Dr. Golok Chandra Goswami (1982): “It is supposed that like other Aryan languages, Assamese was also born from Apabhramsa dialect developed from Magadhi Prakrit of the eastern group of Sanskrit language”

Dr. S. K. Chatterjee (1926) while trying to establish Bengali and Assamese as one language said, “the Modern representatives of Magadhi Apabhrams are Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Magahi, Maithili and Bhojpuriya. In the middle of the 7th century as the testimony of Hiuen Sang would seem to suggest, there was one language spoken in Bihar, Bengal and western Assam. Only in Assam, there was a deviation probably in phonetics only. Bengali and Assamese are practically one language, when a comparison is instituted among the Magadhan speeches and Oriya is most closely related to Bengali-Assamese.”
On the other hand, Dr. B. K. Kakati (1987) admitting the link of Assamese with Magadhi Apabhrams, shows that Assamese and Bengali are two different independent speeches developed from Magadhan Apabhrams.

Based upon G. A. Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India (Vol I, Part 1), S. K. Chatterjee has shown that the history of Assamese language has born from Apabhrams and it can be shown diagrammatically as the following:

1.3 The English Language in India as well as in Assam

English in India enjoys nearly a dominant place in our educational system as well as in our national life as it did in the pre-1947 era. The pride of place it enjoyed at that point of time stemmed from official patronage; and today it is due to globalization, market forces and democratic aspirations of the common man. The phenomenon has resulted in million of pupils to learn English in primary and secondary schools in the country. It is generally held that the British introduced English in our educational system in order to produce cheap clerks for their
colonial administration and to produce what Lord Macaulay called, “a class of people, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”

After independence, English was seen as a foreign language and was given a lower status for a few years. It was envisaged Hindi as the only official language of India and English was to continue for fifteen years from the date of adoption of the constitution. Because of the vehement opposition initiated by the Southern states, English was made as the Associate Official Language along with Hindi by the Official Languages Act, 1963.

English nevertheless continues to occupy an important place as the lingua franca in independent India. Besides being the Associate official language for inter-state communication and communication between the states and the centre, English is the only language, which is understood by the educated people all over the country.

At the national level, English continues to serve as our ‘window on the world’; it will continue to provide access to the growing fund of knowledge in science, technology, social sciences and humanities and thereby function as the 'language of development' and 'upward social mobility'.

At the individual level (the level of educated individuals), English continues to be ‘the language of opportunity’, ‘the language of upward social mobility’, and ‘the language used in transactional interactions’. Any individual seeking socio-economic advancement at the national level will find ability in English an asset.

Moreover, it continues to be a language of great international importance. As an international link language, English is a promoter of inter-state mobility
contributing in some measure to national unity and integration. It helps us to link with the outside world.

English serves to play a role of Indigenized Variety of English (IVE) in India. It seems that English is one of the Indian languages, recognized throughout the country. “Within India there are a large number of regional varieties, each different from the other in certain ways and retaining to some extent the phonetic patterns of the Indian languages spoken in that particular region. These regional varieties of English are sometimes not even mutually intelligible” (Bansal R. K., 1966, Vol-I)

As far as the North-Eastern States of India are concerned, English serves to play a role of link language among the educated people of North-East India. There are eight states in the North-East and they are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Nagaland has adopted English as the official language whereas English occupies unofficial status of official language in the remaining seven North Eastern states. The use of English in India as well as in Assam is of paramount importance as it is used for interpersonal and intra-state communication. Before the annexation of Assam under British Rule in 1826, the direct influence of the English language was not realized in Assam although the Bible was translated into Assamese in 1813. “By the establishment of schools with the two subjects namely English and Bengali as the medium of instruction in 1835 at Guwahati and in 1841 at Sibsagar, the process of the English education in Assam was started” (Barpujari Heramba Kanta, 1988).
1.4 The Present Study

The present work makes an attempt to study the implication of pedagogy of English vocabulary items for basic Assamese medium learners of Kamrup district. It also tries to find out the learners’ problematic areas regarding the acquisition of the minimal unit of the language under study and the factors involved in the teaching and learning of English vocabulary as a second language. The present study looks at the appropriate English vocabulary teaching approach and methods in which both teachers and students feel confident that they can meet their goals of English language teaching and learning effectively. It also assesses the Assamese learners’ strategies in order to learn English vocabulary items.

1.5 The Role of Vocabulary in Language

Vocabulary is central to language and is of great significance to language learners. David Wilkins (1972:111) summed up the importance of vocabulary for language learning: “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.”

If language structures are the skeleton of language, then vocabulary provides the vital organs and the flesh. Words are the building blocks of a language since they label objects, actions, ideas without which people cannot convey the intended meaning. The role of the lexicon in communication as well as language learning is considered to be integral and of utmost importance. It is a vehicle of understanding and self-expression.

1.6 Vocabulary: Definition and Types

Before proceeding to any other issues relating to vocabulary, we shall have a look at various definitions of vocabulary and its types because we feel that such
a discussion on vocabulary is quite relevant to the present study. Dictionaries define vocabulary as follows:-

Hornby (1995) in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, says Vocabulary is:

- Total number of words that make up a language.
- Body of words known to a person or use in particular book, subject, etc.
- List of words with their meanings, especially one which accompanies a text –book a foreign language.

According to Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, a vocabulary is defined as “all the words known and used by a particular person”. However, the words known and used by a particular person don’t constitute all the words a person is exposed to.

According to Victoria N. and David B. (1995: 1494), Vocabulary is a list of words and often phrases, abbreviations, inflectional forms, and all the words used by a particular person; socio-economic group.

Carter V. Good (1959:642) in ‘Dictionary of Education’ states that vocabulary is the content and function words of language which relearn thoroughly, they become part of child’s understanding, speaking, later reading and writing vocabulary. He also defines vocabulary as the words having meaning when heard or seen even though not produced by individual himself to communicate with other.

From the statement above, Good concludes that vocabulary is the words of a language which have meaning and function. Though the definitions are different from each other, but the important point is that vocabulary influences people to make up a language.
The dictionary definition of vocabulary could be further extended to include:

(a) Words used in classroom interaction.
(b) In class work by the students.

Some classifications of vocabulary are given in the following paragraph:

Harmer (1991:159) divided vocabulary into two kinds. These are (a) Active Vocabulary (b) Passive Vocabulary.

(a) Active Vocabulary refers to vocabulary that the students have learnt and are expected to be used by the students.
(b) Passive Vocabulary refers to that which the students will recognize when they meet them, but they will probably not be able to produce.

Barnhart (1968) listed types of vocabulary in order of most ample to most limited:

(a) Reading Vocabulary: A person’s reading vocabulary is all the words he or she can recognize when reading. This is the largest type of vocabulary simply because it includes the other three.
(b) Listening Vocabulary: A person’s listening vocabulary is all the words he or she can recognize when listening to speech. The vocabulary is aided in size by context and tone of voice.
(c) Writing Vocabulary: A person’s writing vocabulary is all the words he or she can employ in writing. Contrary to the previous two vocabulary types, the writing vocabulary is stimulated by its user.
(d) Speaking Vocabulary: A person’s speaking vocabulary is all the words he or she can use in speech. Due to the spontaneous nature of the speaking vocabulary, words are often misused. This misuse, though,
slight and unintentional - may be compensated by facial expressions, hence gestures or tone of voice.

(e) Focal Vocabulary: Focal Vocabulary is a specialized set of terms and distinctions that is particularly important to a certain group, those with a particular focus of experience or activity. A lexicon or vocabulary is a language’s dictionary, its set of name for things, events and ideas. Some linguists believe that lexicon influence people’s perception on things (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: the structure of our language must, to some extent, determine the way we perceive the world). For example, the Nuer of Sudan has an elaborate vocabulary to describe “cattle”. The Nuer has dozens of names for cattle because of the cattle’s particular histories, economies and environments. English speakers can also elaborate cattle vocabularies when the need arises (Miller, Lenkeit, 1989).

(f) Passive vs. active vocabulary: Even if we learn a word, it takes a lot of practice and context connections for us to learn it. A rough grouping of words we understand when we hear them encompasses our “passive vocabulary” whereas our “active vocabulary” is made up of words that come to our mind immediately when we have to use them in a sentence, as we speak. In this case, we often have to come up with a word in the timeframe of milliseconds, so one has to know it well, often in combinations with other words in phrases where it is commonly used. It is generally accepted that in one’s lexicon receptive or passive vocabulary is much larger than productive vocabulary and that reception precedes production (Aitchison, 1987; Clark, 1993).
Carter V Good (1959) listed eleven types of vocabulary:

a) Active vocabulary: The words which the child uses for speaking and writing.

b) Passive vocabulary: The words, which the child only recognizes but does not use for active purpose.

c) Basic vocabulary: The words which are considered essential for minimal use of a language.

d) Comprehension vocabulary: The words which the child can comprehend.

e) Listening vocabulary: The words which the child listens when spoken to them.

f) Potential vocabulary: The words that one can interpret from the contexts.

g) Reading vocabulary: The words which the child recognizes when he sees them in print.

h) Recognition vocabulary: The child understands but not necessarily uses them in writing.

i) Slight vocabulary: The words that the child immediately recognizes as he reads without resort to word analysis technique.

j) Speaking vocabulary: The words that the child uses in speech.

k) Writing vocabulary: The words that the child uses in active writing.

It is neither practicable nor desirable to teach afore said types of vocabulary as listed by various linguists. In that case, a glossary of basic vocabulary would contain the words considered essential for minimal use of the language at a given level.

1.7 Principles of learning and teaching vocabulary

Learning vocabulary is a complex process. The students’ aim to be
achieved in learning vocabulary is primarily their ability to recall the word at will and to recognize it in its spoken and written forms. The principles focus on vocabulary teaching on the assumptions that learners can be taught and can teach themselves.

There are several general principles for successful teaching (Wallace, 1988):

• **Aim** – What is to be taught, which word and how many.
• **Need** – Target vocabulary should respond students’ real needs and interests.
• **Frequent exposure and repetition.**
• **Meaningful presentation** – Clear and unambiguous denotation or reference should be assured.

Words are the building blocks of a language since they label objects, actions, ideas without which people cannot convey the intended meaning. Generally, knowing a word involves knowing its forms and its meanings at the basic level. However, there is far more to a vocabulary item than just meaning. Knowing a word is also defined as knowing its spelling, pronunciation, collocation (i.e., word it occurs with) and appropriateness (Nation, 1990).

According to Harmer (1991), in deeper aspects, it means the abilities to know its:

1. **Meaning**, i.e., relate the word to an appropriate object or context.
2. **Usage**, i.e., knowledge of its collocation, metaphors and idioms, as well as style and register (the appropriate level of formality), to be aware of any connotations and associations the word might have.
3. **Word formation**, i.e. ability to spell and pronounce the word correctly, to know any deviations (acceptable prefixes and suffixes).
4. Grammar, i.e. to use it in the appropriate grammatical form.

According to Laufer (1997:141), the knowledge of a word incorporates the following aspects:

a) Form- spoken and written, i.e. pronunciation and spelling.

b) Word structure – the basic free morpheme (or bound root morpheme) and the common derivation of the word and its inflections.

c) Syntactic pattern of the word in a phrase and sentence.

d) Meaning: referential (including multiplicity of meaning and metaphorical extension of meaning), affective (the connotation of the word) and pragmatic (the suitability of the word in a particular situation).

e) Lexical relations of the word with other words such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy.

f) Common collocations.

1.8 Objectives of teaching and learning English in Assamese medium schools

Teaching and learning is a complementary process since the teacher while teaching a language has to follow the same principles that are required by the pupil for learning purposes.

Language learning is not an activity that takes place in vacuum. It should be planned with a definite set of objectives. "Objectives are really nothing more than a particular way of formulating or stated content and activities (Nunan; 1988: 60). Objectives help us to state the skills and abilities that the learners will get from the learning process. H. E. Palmer (1925) says that the learning of a language must proceed on a philosophical basis and not on a literary one, since the learner has to master the language before learning the literature. English is
considered as the most important language of the world, which is being used in
day-to-day communication. English has been included as a compulsory subject in
the curriculum of all the schools in India. Students of Assamese medium schools
start learning English after having knowledge of their first language or the mother
tongue that is Assamese. Earlier Assamese medium learners started learning
English much later than the student in the English medium schools did. The study
of English in Assamese medium schools began in class V and the students in these
schools study English for six years that is up to class X. But in a recent move, it is
introduced from class I so as to keeping conformity with the duration prescribed
for effective learning of the language and hence, the students continue to study the
language for ten years.

The text books ‘New English Reader I’, ’New English Reader II’, ‘New
English Reader III’ for classes V, VI and VII respectively, are based on
communicative approach.

The objectives of teaching English at the upper primary level for class V
are to help the learners (New English Reader - I):

1) Listen to and understand English spoken by their teachers, classmates
and others.

2) Speak English and perform certain language functions while talking to
their teachers, classmates and others.

3) Read and understand the given reading material.

4) Write simple English in answering questions and doing language
exercises.

5) Recite / sing rhymes in English.
6) Learn elements of language, such as sounds, words, phrases, sentences and the structures.

The basic aim of teaching English for classes VI and VII is to develop in learners the ability to listen, speak, read and write English as a second language so that they can perform a variety of linguistic functions in real life situations (English Reader II, English Reader III).

The textbooks New English Reader I, New English Reader II, New English Reader III are based on communicative approach. These highlight on achieving linguistic performance on the part of the learner. Language learning involves an understanding of how it is actually used in day-to-day communication. Students must take an active role during the process of learning. The classroom should provide an opportunity so that the learner engages himself in using the language to communicate. But what is noticed is that the situation is not conducive for practicing this approach.

The textbooks aim to develop the four language skills in a communicative way but the problem arises when teaching the courses as most of the teachers are not well-equipped in a communicative way.

The majority of English teachers believe that though the textbooks are communication oriented focusing on both communication as well as structure, yet they use traditional ways for teaching the courses prescribed in the textbooks. It shows a kind of discrepancy of what they think what language teaching is all about and what they actually do in teaching the language.

What is understood is that a language is best learnt by using it in real life situation. It has been aimed at developing communication skill. In order to enable the Assamese medium learners to acquire a practical command over the English
language, which is the ultimate aim of teaching English during the school stage, the following four objectives of teaching English have been formulated.

(a) **Understanding English when Spoken**

The learner should be able to understand English when spoken within a general vocabulary under the conditions of normal communication among native speakers. In order to understand, they are required to be given ear-training exercises and opportunities of listening to correct English sounds.

(b) **Speaking Correct English**

The learner should be able to speak English correctly regarding topics of every day interest with an acceptable pronunciation and correct stress and intonation within appropriate vocabulary. He has to master four tasks in order to master speech:

(i) Comprehension of other’s speech.

(ii) Building a vocabulary.

(iii) Combining words into sentences.

(iv) Pronunciation

(c) **Understanding Written English**

During the school stage, the learner should be able to read simple non-technical English of ordinary correspondence, newspapers, magazines, school textbooks and simple modern English books of general interest with comprehension.

(d) **Writing Correct English**

During the school stage, the learner should be able to write simple English while answering questions and doing language exercises. On the completion of the school stage, he should be able to write letters in simple English, pen down his
personal experiences as well as express his views on an ordinary subject correctly.
The classification of the above mentioned four objectives into two pairs, viz., (a) receptive or passive and (b) expressive or active, can be shown diagrammatically as:

However, it should be kept in mind that teaching of English should focus on the development of both receptive and productive abilities. All the objectives are equally important as far as second language teaching is concerned.

1.9 Knowing a Language

Knowing a language involves mastering of three constituents, viz., sound, structure and vocabulary. However, mastery over a language does not mean knowing all the words of the language. C. C. Fries (1945) rightly says that if it means so, then no one can be said to have learnt even his own mother tongue since it is not possible to know all the words of the mother tongue even. According to Fries, a person can be said to have learnt a second language when
he has within a limited amount of vocabulary mastered the sound system, that is 'the stream of speech' and acquires the ability to produce it and has then, “made the structural devices, that is, the basic arrangements of utterances, matters of automatic habit”. The main objectives of 'knowing a language’ unlike 'knowing about a language' which emphasize the knowledge of linguistics and grammar of the language, are to help the learner so that he can be able to do in day to day communication. However, knowing English implies the mastery of the three constituents of the English language with the help of four basic skills: understanding (listening), speaking, reading and writing.

1.10 Problems of Teaching English in Assam

There are many problems prevalent in teaching and learning situation of the English language in Assam. The first problem, one notices, is the dismal performance shown by the Assamese medium learners after ten years of studying the English language in Primary and High School stage. Many students are unable to communicate orally in simple English. If the basic aim incorporated in the syllabus is to enable the students to communicate and participate in real life situations, then why our students fail to do so, is an emerging problem. From this standpoint, it seems that the incorporation of communicative approach in the syllabus fails to produce the desired output.

In general, in Assamese medium schools what is found is that the standard of teaching as well as learning English is very weak. The teachers of English employ grammar translation method to teach English as well as English vocabulary which cannot help the students to use the language productively as far as active communication is concerned. The basic objectives of teaching and
learning English are considered to be partially fulfilled in Assamese medium schools.

Assamese medium learners lack communicative competence as they are facing insufficient exposure. They need to use English not only in the classroom, but also outside it. Because of the fact, they are less familiar to English sounds and as a result of this their pronunciation is faulty. So, there is a need to use as much English as possible in the classroom as well as outside it and it has to be focused on.

It is quite common in Assamese medium schools that teachers even knowing the importance of using English in the classroom to get the students familiar with it, frequently use word - to - word translation from English into Assamese, perhaps thinking that if translation, not being used, might result in lack of comprehension of the text on the part of the students which affects the students' passing the examination. Even if the teachers start teaching English without translation, students feel uncomfortable and they expect the teachers' use of translation since they have been familiar and accustomed to it so far. It has also been noticed that a good percentage of teachers of English are unable to speak English as well. They become confused when they are to use English in real life situations. Sometimes, even a frustrated lot opt for teaching as a career. They are not at all qualified to teach English as a foreign/second language.

It is quite noticeable that many of the teachers do not even participate in teacher's in-service training programme conducted by "English Language Teaching Institute"(ELTI), Kahilipara and even if some teachers participate in order to update themselves for acquiring new information in the area of language
teaching, they hardly implement those for teaching English in mother tongue dominated English classroom situation.

At the same time, the teachers face the pressure to complete the course of the text within the stipulated period of time, emphasizing on the contents rather than the skills of language. There is a need to change the situation of teaching and learning English in the Assamese medium schools where the focus of teaching should shift from 'teaching about English' to 'teaching English.' After all, teaching English efficiently constitutes an awesome challenge to the teachers. While English is a skill subject, they would teach it as knowledge of content subjects like History or Social studies. The skills of listening and speaking are neglected in English class room. And there is hardly any action research undertaken by the teachers. Moreover, Learning English is basically dependent on the learner's urge or the desire to learn. Everything else is secondary. However, the conditions for learning English in Assamese medium schools are totally different. 'English' as a subject is taken to be difficult by the students. In most cases, there is no real urge to learn English, since the learners can 'get on' easily with their own mother tongue that is Assamese. Motivation is a stimulus to speaking and it should be created among the students by the teachers of English.

Today, in Assamese medium schools there is a need to tackle the problems in order to overcome the pitiable scenario of language learning teaching situation.

1.11 Present Situation of the English Language in Assamese Medium Schools

There is no environment in which students can use English, to be found in Assamese medium schools as well as outside it especially in rural Kamrup District. The rural situation doesn’t demand for communicating in English. As a result of this, students do not find any opportunity to practice and improve their
English. Even if any encouraging student tries to speak English at least in the classroom, then there may arise a situation in which other fellow students may laugh at him commenting as if he is doing too much. It happens because of the fact that English language proficiency of Assamese medium students at all levels has been considerably poor. The level of competence and the student's command over English remains highly limited.

Teachers play a crucial role as far as second language teaching is concerned. He is the one who is concerned with adopting effective approach or methods as well as suitable teaching strategies. For this to happen, the language teacher has to be proficient enough who can be a role model to his/her students. He has to be cautious of his own shortcomings. His own faulty pronunciation may result a negative attitude in the mind of his/her students. Gatenby (1967: 213) is right when he says:

"If we can train the teacher, make him efficient, and give him confidence, he can himself remove or get rid of most of the other drawbacks."

1.12 Background and Motivation for the study

This study concerns with the pedagogical implications of English vocabulary items for basic Assamese medium learners. It focuses on how basic level Assamese medium learners face various problems regarding the acquisition of English vocabulary items.

Since Assamese medium learners do not get enough exposure to English, they tend to encounter several problems or difficulties in learning the minimal unit of language that is word. As basic level learners, they face difficulties in articulating proper pronunciation, perceiving correct spelling, gain faulty knowledge of word structure, as well as confusions arising out of identical lexical
items that have different meanings. All these problems faced by the student community motivated us to choose the present topic to explore the teaching of pedagogical implication of English vocabulary items.

Teaching of English vocabulary, in its proper perspective, is still one of the most neglected areas regarding the teaching of the English language. Traditionally teaching of vocabulary in Assamese medium schools is meant to be giving the exact equivalent meanings of the English words in the learner's mother tongue that is Assamese. There is less focus seen on correct pronunciation, spelling as well as on word formation in Assamese medium schools. Considering all these, there is a need of teaching English vocabulary concerning all the aspects of knowing a word for upper primary level learners. The present work is one of the pioneering studies conducted, about learning and teaching of English vocabulary along with its difficult areas for basic level Assamese learners.

The following are the reasons for choosing this topic for our research:

(a) The problem of acquiring English sounds by Assamese medium learners and there is a need to explore the phonemic inventory of Standard Assamese English.

(b) The problem of acquiring correct spelling of English words and there is a need to investigate.

(c) The problem of acquiring the structure of English words and there is a need to investigate the problematic areas regarding inflexional and derivational morphology.

(d) The problem of acquiring different meanings per word arising out of the identical types that have several meanings and there is a need to investigate.
(e) The strategies that are adopted by Assamese medium learners in learning English vocabulary items.

(f) The way how teaching English vocabulary should be well organized by the teacher so as to enable the learners to speak, read, write and understand English correctly by involving them into more effective learner-centred environment.

1.13 Aims and objectives of the study

The subjects of the present study are the students of classes V, VI and VII from Assamese medium schools of rural Kamrup District. They have relatively a poor command over English as they have insufficient exposure of English even in the classroom situation. They hardly hear English in the classroom since the teachers use grammar translation method to teach English.

The specific aims and objectives of the study are the following:

(a) To explore the so-called difficult areas of vocabulary learning faced by basic Assamese medium learners.

(b) To investigate various learning strategies for acquisition of English vocabulary employed by Assamese medium learners of English.

(c) To help the teachers to know the best methods and ways of teaching English vocabulary items.

(d) To assess the pedagogical implications of English vocabulary items for the concerned classes under study.

1.14 Purpose and Scope of the study

English, being a living language, occupies an important place and enjoys a higher status. The place of English is considered as an utmost importance in the
context of second language teaching scenario. The study tries to focus on the
teaching implication of English vocabulary in order to enable the students to
speak, read, write and understand English correctly.

Considering these, the present study intends to shed light on the students’
problematic areas of learning English as a second language especially in the area
of vocabulary at upper primary school stage. The scope of the present study is
limited to the area of vocabulary teaching along with how basic Assamese
medium learners face difficulties in acquiring the basic aspects relating to
knowing word viz., phonological, orthographical, morphological and semantic
aspects and what are the strategies they use in acquiring English vocabulary. The
survey is restricted to a selected sample concerning all these aspects from
Assamese medium schools of rural Kamrup District.

1.15 Statement of the Problem

There are various issues associated with pedagogical implications of
English especially in the area of vocabulary in the context of second language
teaching scenario. A number of factors associated with the learners of English
concern with their inability to acquire basic aspects of word knowledge in a
proper and adequate way. It focuses on the appropriate and effective learning
strategies to be adopted by a second language learner especially by an Assamese
medium learner of English. Secondly, the factor associated with the teacher
concerns his problem of presenting of vocabulary. The problem of teaching
vocabulary lies in the fact that the teacher cannot normally teach the vocabulary of
his/her own choice, since he/she is constrained to follow the vocabulary
prescribed by the text book complier, his/her own concern is with presentation
rather than selection. Next problem concerning about the number of words to be
taught arise in front of the teacher. Would he select the basic meaning of the word or the frequent meaning? What does the teacher do with identical words that have different meanings? The area of vocabulary teaching has other problems like:

a) How many words per meaning?
   e.g. synonym.

b) How many distributions per word?
   e.g. a particular vocabulary as a noun, verb, adjective, etc.

c) How many variations per word?
   e.g. prefixes and suffixes.

The emergence of vocabulary teaching as a problem area lies the teacher's lack of competence to get his students the basic vocabulary along with ineffective methodology, lack of motivation in the part of the learners, large classes etc.

The present study tries to investigate these problems: the part being played by basic Assamese learners of English while acquiring English words, the part being played by the teacher while teaching vocabulary, the methodologies used and how all these factors affect the teaching learning situation in order to facilitate a healthy teaching learning atmosphere where a prime and essential requirement for meaningful and effective language instruction is possible with equal participation of both the teacher and the learner.

1.16 Methodology

Within the interpretative perspective adopted, the researcher uses both qualitative as well as quantitative method along with the tool such as questionnaires both for students and teachers. The present study also relates to comparative phonological systems of British RP and General Indian English so as
to explore the phonemic inventory of General Assamese English. It involves application of descriptive and comparative method.

The researcher also administered tests in order to collect data regarding the problem areas on phonology, orthography, morphology and semantics faced by basic level Assamese medium learners of rural Kamrup District while learning English vocabulary.

1.17 Organization of the study

This dissertation comprises of seven chapters.

The first chapter entitled “Introduction” deals with introduction and general background to the research.

The second chapter “Review of Literature” discusses the review of related literature concerning English vocabulary in the context of second language teaching scenario.

The third chapter “English vocabulary: problem areas regarding its acquisition for Assamese learners of English” deals with the difficulties faced by Assamese medium learners in the areas of pronunciation, spelling, word structure - the common inflexions and derivations of a word at the basic level and meaning.

The fourth chapter “Acquisition of English vocabulary items” discusses various strategies adopted by Assamese medium learners while acquiring English vocabulary items.

The fifth chapter “Approaches and methods of teaching English vocabulary” is about the historical background of various methods along with merits and demerits used in teaching English as well as teaching English vocabulary.
The sixth chapter “Research Methodology and data analysis” discusses the methodologies adopted by the researcher in the present study along with data analysis and discussion.

The seventh chapter “Conclusions and Recommendations” which is devoted to various drills and practices instructed by the teacher of English so as to get his students to identify the concept correctly as well as to help them recall or recognize the word for active or passive use.