INTRODUCTION

Language is omnipresent in society today. David Crystal has defined language as "the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs, or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression." Counting the number of languages present in the world is definitely an arduous task. Due to the immense diversity of languages it has often been felt that the development of a common and international language will help bridge linguistic barriers and bring people together.

Globalization has lead to the integration of the world and also the thinning of national borders. Robertson says that 'globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole'. English has now become a global phenomenon. The media and the internet have seemingly pushed English as the world language. It is believed that knowledge of English offers a 'window to the world'. It is estimated that 1.3 billion people will use English as a first or second language by the year 2050. After the Second World War Britain and the United States became the two most politically inclined countries. English has gained in importance because it has been linked to these two world superpowers over the last two centuries.

The English language has permeated almost all aspects of Indian society. How deeply this language has penetrated the country is evident from the fact that out of the hundreds of regional languages spoken here, it was
however, English which was chosen as the associate official language. Hindi is the national and supposedly the main link language in India. However Hindi is mainly spoken in North India. The southern states are not much related to this language. The same can be said of the states of north-east India. In the case of Assam people do have an idea of this language but most people are not very conversant in Hindi. This is perhaps one of the reasons why English has been retained in the country and also internalized to a considerable degree.

The fact that India has had a greater exposure to English than any other country has resulted in its seepage into almost all domains of life. English plays a dominant role in the media, in education, in the parliament, in the judiciary, in journalism and in broadcasting. English has made inroads into the entertainment business. The advent of satellite television and the availability of many channels transformed the entertainment world. Today there are a number of English news channels and often songs liberally sprinkled with English words are heard. Some Indian movies also have English in their titles. ("Student of the Year", "Me and my Sister").

Assam is situated in the North-East region of India. Assam boasts of a multi-ethnical society. Assamese undoubtedly is the official language of the state and also happens to be one of the languages listed in the 18th schedule of the constitution. Assam however is multi-lingual and most people speak more than one language. The world today has been converted into a global village and modern society into a knowledge society. In this set-up the English
language which has attained the status of an international language has gained in popularity. The credit for the popularity of the English language in Assam must be handed over to the British. Though the beginnings of this language are doused in colonialism but now it has become an academic and economic reality in Assam. In the words of the famous linguist Tom McArthur, "In the closing years of the twentieth century the English language has become a global resource. As such it does not owe its existence or the protection of its essence to any nation or group".

This language has been accused of creating a social divide. Fluency in this language assures a place in the upper rungs of the social ladder. This is another point which is significant for this study. The beliefs which the young generation nurtures are important because that will be a deciding factor in identifying the future of this language in their state and country.

In this state there is on the one hand the burgeoning impact of this language and on the other hand the apprehension that this language also brings in its wake a new culture and way of life which could pose a great threat to the native language. This is in keeping with Kachru's view who says that in India there is "a continued agonizing and schizophrenic debate about the status of English and its role in the region." This continuing debate happens to be the starting point of this study. This study finds it relevant to investigate the attitude of the people of Assam and also the student community towards the English language. For the purpose of this study it has been assumed that the people
of Assam nurture a positive attitude towards the English language and that in this age of Globalization English has become a necessity.

Attitude towards a particular language may be studied from various perspectives. Attitude may be either positive or negative. People favour a particular language when they find that the language is a tool to achieve high status and economic advantage. Gardner defines attitude as "the sum total of a man's instincts and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, fears, threats, and convictions about any specified topic".

The aim of this study is to try to find out the factors responsible for defining people's attitude towards this language. Since the study of English language is mandatory in the state it is equally necessary to try to identify the students' viewpoint. If on the one hand there is an excessive desire to learn this language on the other hand from the purists standpoint there is a rejection of this language on the grounds that attraction for this language might result in a cultural crisis. Mc Kay has pointed out that "It is important to remember that speakers and learners of an international language do not need to internalize the cultural norms of native speakers of that language as the ownership of an international language becomes denationalized."

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aims at investigating what factors are responsible in determining the attitude of the people of Assam towards the English language. It will also try to statistically prove the reliability of the factors and find out
which factors have little or no influence at all.

METHODOLOGY

In this study existing Research Methods and Techniques required to generate and feed data in the SPSS software is adopted. **SPSS** is a software package used for statistical analysis. It is now officially named "IBM SPSS Statistics". SPSS is a comprehensive and flexible statistical analysis and data management solution. SPSS can take data from almost any type of file and use them to generate tabulated reports, charts, and plots of distributions and trends, descriptive statistics, and conduct complex statistical analyses. SPSS is available from several platforms; Windows, Macintosh, and the UNIX systems. SPSS is used in virtually every industry, including telecommunications, banking, finance, insurance, healthcare, manufacturing, retail, consumer packaged goods, higher education, government, and market research. SPSS Statistics is loaded with powerful analytic techniques and time-saving features which enables quicker and easier insights into the collected data, so that more accurate predictions can be made and better outcomes can be achieved from the research.

The data required for the SPSS software were collected through a questionnaire survey administered upon a total of 1000 randomly selected samples from various sections of Assamese society. Questionnaires were prepared in English and Assamese and responses were welcomed in either language. Questionnaires were distributed in a number of different locations.
and institutions amongst people of different age groups and income categories.

In preparing for and conducting the survey certain preliminary stages had to be crossed. These stages included determining the survey approach that would be adopted, determining the processes and procedures that would be adopted in analyzing the responses and production of the draft questionnaire for the pilot survey. Both the analytical method and technical study has been adopted in this study. A descriptive field survey method is used in analyzing the students' perspective towards the English language.

At the very beginning 10 focus group interviews were conducted comprising of 7-8 persons each. Out of these 10 groups, 3 groups comprised of Senior citizens, 5 groups comprised of colleagues, friends, businessmen and service holders and 2 groups comprised of the student community—the present day upcoming generation. After interacting with the various groups, the following content or themes were found relevant for the study.

1. Perceived utility of the English language
2. Attitudes towards studying English
3. Interest in the international community
4. English as a means of intranational communication
5. The English language as a passport for employment
6. English in personality development
Questions were framed keeping in mind the themes which emerged out of the focus group interviews. In preparing the questionnaire care was taken to maintain the standard and quality of the questions. Initially a pilot survey was conducted among 210 respondents. The questions were formulated with specific reference to the overall direction of the research. The pilot questionnaire contained 45 questions (statements) but in the main survey 34 questions (statements) were included. All the statements were rated on the Likert Scale of 7 possible answers: 1-Strongly disagree, 2-Moderately disagree, 3-Disagree, 4-Neutral, 5-Agree; 6-Moderately agree and 7-Strongly agree. The data was collected and analyzed by employing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

**Limitations of the Study**

- The survey uses the seven point Likert scale. One limitation is built into the survey itself. There is the 'neutral' option in the survey which calls for 'fence sitting'. This option is the easiest way out when any dilemma arises and one is unclear about the
choice between agreement and disagreement on the survey items.

- Although focus was given to generate error free questionnaire, still the study may suffer from errors resulting from inadequate framing of questions. The survey statements can be considered a limitation because some of the statements are unclear about how they can be interpreted. Some of the statements on the survey may be misunderstood or misinterpreted due to the 'vagueness' of the statements.

- Another limitation is the areas covered in the questionnaire. Some respondents felt that the coverage was inadequate while some felt the questionnaire was lengthy and needed to be cut short.

Further, in order to find out the students perspective towards English, 100 questionnaires were distributed amongst students of Higher Secondary First Year. This questionnaire is based on the 'Yes' and 'No' format. In framing this questionnaire too the above mentioned themes bore relevance. In this era of Globalization English has been transformed into a global language. A whole new spectrum of job opportunities has opened up for those who are proficient in English. Multinationals, call centres, medical transcription centres all require employees with good communication skills. In today's scenario, international travel or working abroad in places where English is the lingua franca is a
common phenomenon. Keeping in mind these changing trends it became necessary to study the attitude of the students towards this language.

The changing role and status of English is quite evident. The different cultural aspects of English are apparent in terms like International or World language, Global language and World Englishes. Surveys of attitudes towards any language provide social indications of changing beliefs about language and also about the future of a language.