Chapter-III

Problem and Hypotheses
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PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESES

Reading is a straightforward and effortless activity for most of the students but some students struggle to make sense of even simple stories. This simple observation is an indication of the true complexity of the skills involved in reading, where the complex interactive processes are perceived only when they do not occur appropriately. Reading requires different perceptual and cognitive processes, as well as a good knowledge of language and grammar. Processes involved in reading are concerned with phoneme awareness, recognizing words and extracting meaning from individual words. Other processes operate at the level of the phrase or sentence, and still other processes deal with the overall organization or thematic structure of the entire material.

The ultimate goal of reading is to be able to understand written material, to evaluate it, and to use it for one's needs (Chall, 2006). Reading can be seen as an "interactive" process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or reading fluency. In this process, the reader relates to the text and tries to extract the meaning.

To reach maturity in reading, an individual goes through a series of stages. The first stage in reading is called Reading Readiness i.e., initially, in the development of reading and reading comprehension children begin to learn the names and sounds of letters. The next major stage in reading is known as the Beginning Reading stage or Word Recognition stage. By the first grade, children begin to learn the printed equivalents for the spoken words they know (Chall, 2006). Children are taught to use context clues, phonics, structural analysis, and dictionaries for word identification (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Development of Skills is considered the next major stage in reading i.e., students are taught to read more difficult material (new ideas and opinions) with the help of known content (Chall, 2006). In the next major stage Comprehension is taught as a series of sub skills.
Actually, there are 5,000 languages in the world, and all the languages are more alike than different from each other. As people learn languages, they develop certain skills. They naturally transfer the skills learned in the first language to subsequently learnt languages. First language, i.e. the native language is learnt through an acquired system therefore it is preserved throughout the life time and acts as medium for acquisition of subsequent languages. Second language acquisition is the process of learning a language other than one's native language and the reasons for learning the second language may vary from intellectual to economical or practical. Learning any foreign language helps in understanding all language better and learning another tongue helps the individual to widen his/her exposure, thereby leading to cultural broadening. The practical reasons may be equally compelling as in business, knowing the language of the people with whom the business is being transacted is useful in negotiating. Further, any educational institution public or private, is given a boost with knowledge of a foreign language.

Second language learning is subject to influence from factors other than oral development in the first language. If students are not proficient in their first language, they may experience cognitive difficulties in to second language. External factors like interest in, and value of the second language, positive feelings towards second language speakers, self-confidence, anxiety level, memory, aptitude, knowledge of language rules and influences such as phonological coding and phonological access, knowledge of first language, linguistic analysis capacity to analyse language, individual differences, social influence such as opportunity to interact with second language speakers, access to useful feedback from second language speakers and instructions (quantity, quality and design) play an important role in second language learning. These influences all tend to co-vary with age, social economic status (low income families of learner and parent’s education) and motivational factors such as reason for learning second language.

As people learn languages, they develop certain skills. They naturally transfer the skills learned in the first language to subsequently learnt languages. Transfer plays an important role in language learning at all levels. Learners start transferring sounds (phonemic transfer) and meanings (semantic transfer), word order and pragmatics to learn second language. The transfer occurs at the lexis, syntax as well as and discourse level i.e., language transfer typically refers to the
application of rules and forms of the first language into second language. Skills and strategies used in L1 are transferred to L2 and students who used good and effective strategies in their native language also used good strategies in their second language (Holm & Dodd, 1996). Greater lexical skills lead to greater automaticity allowing better readers to more efficiently perform the lexical processes in parallel with other attention demanding tasks (Luan & Wang, 2009; Ruthruff, Allen, Lien & Grabbe, 2008). There are particular stages of development in L1 and L2, through which all children progress, whereas success rate varies and different factors play an important role in language (L1 and L2) acquisition. Second language readers adapt their ways systematically according to the situation. During first language reading, a child learns the settings for his or her first language and during second language reading, a child tries to apply the same settings for his second language also i.e., for second language acquisition one uses some of same input process that are used to acquire the first language (Ellis, 1985).

Researches support a pivotal role of phonemic awareness as a predictor of individual differences in reading development (Hatcher, Snowling & Griffiths, 2002; Helenius , Uutela & Hari, 1999; Hus, 2005; Lervåg, Lyster & Hulme, 2012). Moreover, phonological processing skills have been found to correlate significantly with English reading in the dyslexic group (Ghonsooly & Javadian, 2010) and studies support the view that there is a relationship between phonological skills and reading ability in both L1 and L2 (Ghonsooly & Javadian, 2010). A number of studies have reported that Phonological memory (PM) is an important predictor of proficiency in early L2 learning stages and supports a casual role in learning to read in comparison to other factors (Ashby, 2010; Engel & Gathercole, 2007; Hummel, 2009; Khatib & Fat’hi, 2012; Nag & Snowling, 2010; Chiappe & Siegel 1999; Wagner, & Torgesen , 1987) but some studies showed weak links between expressive phonological disorders and later ability to read either meaningful text or non-words (Bishop & Adams, 1990; Coltheart, Besner, Jonasson & Davelaar, 1979). Word recognition is also assumed to be one of the basic skills to be developed by beginning readers (Adams, 1990; Barron, 1986; Byrne, 1998; Kurvers & Van der Zouw, 1990; Ziegler & Goswami, 2006). It has been proposed that automatic word recognition skills are important for successful reading.
However, only understanding phonemes and recognizing words are not adequate to understand language. Unskilled readers fail to use syntax to assist and help in decoding written material (Cromer & Wiener, 1966). So, it can be said that syntax plays an important role in reading. Bentin, Deutsch, and Liberman (1990) identified syntactic differences between good and poor readers. Vocabulary knowledge has also been implicated as a significant cause of reading difficulties in second language learners (Tabors & Snow, 2001). However, Jamal and Monga (2010) reported that reading accuracy, in case of both words as well as non-words was significantly greater in the native language (Hindi) than in the second language (English). Thus, it appears that a conflux of structural factors influences second language reading and their impact is more evident at poor readers, where lack either of these factors leads to reading difficulties, while their synchronization in good readers makes it difficult to perceive their independent contribution.

In a nutshell, it can be said that one learns the second language via first language and in this process working memory gets overloaded and child takes more time in processing second language in comparison to first language. To be proficient in second language one has to skilled in structural aspects of language and then only one can gain mastery over the semantic aspect, i.e. comprehension the second language via automatic processes.

A series of epidemiological surveys within India indicate the prevalence of dyslexia to be 10.23% among 5-8 year old children, which increases alarmingly to 32% among the 8-16 year age group. Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE, 2008) has also recognized dyslexia as an impairment and facilities like use of calculator in the exam etc, have been allowed to dyslexics. Under the CCE pattern, CBSE has given proper weightage to specific aspects related to each subject in order to provide benefit to the learner; such that deficits in specific areas can be compensated for by ability in others and the identified weaknesses can be catered to by provision of remedial instructions. A survey of the National Center for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP, 2004), revealed that only 1.2 per cent of the disabled in India has had any form of education.

In India, English has the status of second language in a number of states. It is the medium of instruction in a large number of schools where the native language of the children is an Indian language. The use of English as an official language is
widespread. In India, higher education, especially at the post graduate and higher levels places a major emphasis on English as English texts and textbooks are used extensively, particularly at advanced levels and in specialized courses (Dahl, 1998). This makes the ability to read and learn from English texts an essential academic skill. In this age of globalization, in most countries of the world, people who do not speak a second or a foreign language are at a serious disadvantage in the job market and sometimes even in their private sphere of life. It is therefore of great relevance that learners are also provided with equal and appropriate opportunities to learn a second or foreign language.

Thus, in view of the importance of second language learning i.e. English, in India, especially when the medium instruction and examination is the first language, thereby limiting the exposure to the second language, the following problem was formulated for the present study, where English is considering as a second language and Hindi as first Language.

**Problem**

Identification of structural correlates of second language reading proficiency in Middle school children.

**Objectives**

Objectives of the present study were delineated as follows:

1) To study the role of correlates of reading in assessment of reading proficiency in L2.
2) To assess the role of structural factors (letter and word) to L2 reading proficiency.
3) To study the mediating role of L1 in L2 processing.

**Hypotheses**:

The following hypotheses were proposed for the present study:

1) Indices of reading, spelling, writing and creativity would be significantly higher in good L2 readers in comparison to poor L2 readers.
2) Indices of language and creativity in L2 would differentiate between poor and good L2 readers.
3) Letter span of good L2 readers would be significantly greater in comparison to poor L2 readers.
4) Word span of good L2 readers would be significantly greater in comparison to poor L2 readers.

5) Speed of processing at grapheme unit (alphabet) level would be significantly faster in good L2 readers in comparison to poor L2 readers.

6) Speed of processing at semantic unit (word) level would be significantly faster in good L2 readers in comparison to poor L2 readers.

7) Transfer effects of L1 mediation would be significantly more in good L2 readers in comparison to poor L2 readers.

8) Structural correlates of L2 would differentiate between good and poor readers.

The design and methodology used to achieve the objectives of the present investigation have been described in the next chapter.