PREFACE

The skill of reading is one of the corner stones of language proficiency in any language and the skill of reading in English acquires a special significance in a country like India where the students need to read text books and reference books in English to a much larger extent than to write and speak in the language. The present study proposes to examine and survey the teaching of reading to ESL undergraduate students in order to understand and assess its nature, extent and quality.

Chapter one, the introductory chapter of this study aims to briefly outline the teaching of reading in the past four centuries and then moves on to record recent theory and research in reading pedagogy. Most of the theories of reading can be classified into either of the three major groups: bottom-up, top-down and interactive views of reading. A bottom-up view of reading stresses the role of visual input on the written page, that is, recognition of letters and words from the text until meaning is derived.

The top-down paradigm of reading emphasizes the role of higher cognitive processes that generate meaning based on contextual information, background knowledge and reading strategies that the reader brings to the reading task. This view chiefly derives from schema theory in psychology. Schemata are abstract knowledge structures or mental configurations stored in memory and are considered a crucial element in all information
processing. Schema theory has stressed the role of background knowledge in language comprehension which consist of an interaction between the resources of the reader and the characteristics of the text. The interactive view of reading attempts to integrate both the above mentioned views, and acknowledges the importance of graphic as well as contextual information in abstracting meaning from written language. Studies related to all these above mentioned three types of view of reading have been reported in chapter one. This chapter also reports a number of views from the classroom pronounced by different teaching practitioners for efficient teaching of reading.

Chapter two reports recent trends in reading pedagogy and is divided in three sections: theoretical bases, course design, materials and exercises. The first section deals with the theory of language learning, and the theory of reading which forms the basis of the teaching of reading in CLT. The second section deals with course design and outlines the trends in curriculum design at present. The third section describes exercises and materials used at present within the CLT paradigm.

Chapter three, the main part of the thesis records the observation of the teaching of reading in thirty undergraduate classes in AMU. In these thirty classes ten teachers were observed and three continuous classes of each teacher were taken up for study on the basis of an observation schedule which derives
mainly from the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT), the schedule provided by Frohlich, Spada and Allen (1985:53-6). The schedule consists of three sections: Classroom Teaching, including objectives, materials, pre-teaching and main-teaching. The second section Interaction Analysis focusses on the extent and type of classroom interaction. The third section deals with the Pedagogic Principles underlying the classroom practices.

Chapter four, the concluding chapter discusses the findings of the observation of classroom teaching. It aims to examine the teaching of reading in AMU at the undergraduate level with specific reference to CLT practices and principles. In conformity with CLT ideology, it was found that the teaching of strategies seem to be the basis of most classroom activities. However, some practices from the past GT method and the audio-lingual method seem to continue even now in these classrooms. Overall, the approach adopted in the teaching of reading at the undergraduate level in AMU seems to be an eclectic one, which incorporates many of the elements of CLT, but also adopts some practices from the earlier methods of teaching.

In the 1970s and 80s, communicative language teaching created a lot of enthusiasm and was considered as a panacea for all pedagogical ills. However, by the end of 1980s, the flaws and shortcomings of this method became obvious and teaching theorists and practitioners realized that no single method can provide all the
answers to all the questions and so the best approach is that which adopts techniques and practices from different sources according to the requirements of the given teaching context.

Many ideas, and a lot of encouragement and inspiration from several sources have gone into the making of the present work. There are many whose contribution needs to be acknowledged but there are a few who deserve special acknowledgement at an individual and personal level.

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(Garima Sharma)