Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This first chapter forms an Introduction to the thesis and as such it focuses on English Language Teaching in India and Gujarat so as to create a perspective for the problem under study. In order to have a fuller understanding of the present ELT scenario, it is necessary to trace events back in the 18th and the 19th centuries that have made English what it is today in India. It is generally believed that Gujarat, a comparatively progressive and prosperous Western Indian state presents a rather disappointing picture so far as English Language Teaching is concerned. This can be understood properly only when we examine the scene in the light of the history.

1.1 Historical Perspective

The year 1707 witnessed the death of Aurangzeb, the last and perhaps the most powerful Mughal emperor of India. His death set off the gradual weakening of the Mughal dynasty that Babur founded in 1526. By the time of Aurangzeb, various European powers - especially the British and the French - had been competing among themselves to establish supremacy over India. In 1757, Robert Clive, a young East India Company clerk turned commander defeated Nawab Siraj-ud-Dowlah on the battlefield of Plassey. As a result of this, a vast area of Bengal was brought
under the control of the East India Company. The story of the success of the Company's forces was repeated and the Britishers were destined to replace the mighty Mughal Empire. The English became the overlords of Delhi (the centre of the Mughal power) in 1801 and the reigning Mughal emperor became their pensioner (Singh, Khushwant 1992).

The British East India Company, in the earlier years of its establishment in India, pursued a policy of indifference towards or non-interference with the internal affairs of the native population. Their sole purpose was to strengthen their position. Political power and profits resulting from fair or unfair trade practices were their priority. Education of the natives was not the goal of the British rule. Early efforts at educating the natives were mainly carried out by the missionaries (Jadeja 1988). English was used by the missionaries as the medium of instruction. The British East India Company followed the policy of neutrality until 1813, the year in which the charter of the British parliament forced the Company to take some direct responsibility of educating Indians (Sood 1988). But which language was to be the medium of instruction - English or some oriental language, such as Arabic or Sanskrit?

There was a growing demand for English as a medium of instruction. A few enlightened Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy advocated the use of English. In 1792, Charles Grant had advocated the instruction of English as "the true cure of darkness" ["Darkness" - that is, the ignorance of the native population] (Mukerji 1957). The debate between the Orientalists (those who favoured the use of a native language - Sanskrit or Arabic) and the Anglicists (those favouring English) was set at rest, finally, by Macaulay's
Minutes of 1835. Lord Macaulay was for the spread of Western learning through the medium of English.

"We have to educate a people who can not be educated at present by means of their mother tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claim of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate". (Cited in Krishnaswamy et al. 1992)

Lord William Bentick accepted Macaulay's recommendation and sanctioned the minutes officially in 1836, amid protests from the Orientalists and Vernacularists. In 1837, English was made the court language of the country. Hardinge, the then governor-general issued a resolution in 1844 to the effect that in all government appointments preference will be given to persons with a knowledge of English. The Council of Education, Calcutta was authorised to conduct competitive examinations annually for selecting candidates for public posts in order of merit. By now English had become the official and academic language of India. English education began to be valued in terms of livelihood (Mukerji 1957). By 1870s, children of all classes had entered the race of the western type of education through English. This race still continues, perhaps on a greater extent (Krishnaswamy et al. 1992). It was this English educated class of Indians, who having been brought up on the western liberal and democratic principles demanded independence for India. Western education and the intellectual reawakening that accompanied it, led to what is called "Indian Renaissance". After a long struggle for Independence, the English left India on 15th August 1947.
India is a multi-lingual country. The Indian Union (1950) adopted Hindi in Devnagari script as the national language. It is ironic, however, that our constitution was first drafted in English and then translated into Indian languages. This irony is the metaphor for the place of English in India. It was decided that English would continue as an associate official language till 1965 by which time Hindi was expected to develop as a language for mass communication and replace English. However, this did not happen (Sood 1988). Indians have not yet been able to clearly define the role and status of English in India. Some want to retain English and some want to do away with it once and for all. While some others accept English as a "necessary evil" in that they publicly declare that the language should be thrown out of country and at the same time send their children or grandchildren to good English medium schools (Krishnaswamy et al. 1992).

1.2 ELT in India

In linguistic complexity India is almost like the continent of Europe. And in this highly multilingual national context, English has the constitutional status of an "associate official language". As such it is the dominant medium of communication in administration, higher education, industry and commerce, science and technology, and journalism. The value of English can hardly be overestimated in the given circumstances. English has been variously described as the "window on the world", and as "language of opportunity or development". One finds more books in English than in any other Indian language, especially books related to
science, technology, arts, valued professions, and education. English continues to be used as a link language across the country.

Such importance of English may easily mislead one into believing that "all is well" with the teaching of English in India. However, we need a few facts to get in touch with reality. The status and role of English have not changed in post-independence India. But the standard of English teaching has certainly deteriorated (Sood 1988). There are all kinds of varieties of English to be found across the country, ranging from a near native variety to a bazaar variety (Krishnaswamy et al. 1992). Only about five percent of the total population of India is estimated to know English and a large proportion of this is "concentrated in the largest cities of the country" (Prabhu 1987). Millions of learners are eager to learn English but the resources are limited, methods of teaching are not suitable to the learners' requirements, and teachers are not well trained. Expensive English medium schools and almost-free government schools exist side by side to cater to the demand for English education. What this practically means is that some learners from the upper class or high-income background have a greater exposure to the language than other learners who are not so fortunate.

ELT situation in India suggests an absence of any kind of language planning; especially in the teaching of English. Even when policies have been framed, their implementation has been unsatisfactory because of lack of political will or lack of co-ordination among the concerned agencies like the central and the state government/s or universities (Krishnaswamy et al. 1992). This has led to an "aimless drift" and striking dissimilarities can be
found as regards to the school year when the teaching of English begins, the total number of school years during which it is taught, whether it is used as a medium of instruction at some level or not, class size and examination (Prabhu 1987; Jadeja 1988).

The age at which the teaching of English starts at school varies among different states. But, generally, it is between 7 and 12 years. The teaching of English at school-leaving stage is compulsory in some states while not in others. As a result, the number of years for instruction of English at school also varies from one state to another. For example, in Gujarat, English is an optional subject from standard V to VII and from standard X onwards. English may or may not be a medium of instruction at university or graduation level in different universities. Class size also varies from state to state, but the average size of class in secondary schools is between 40 and 60 (Prabhu 1987). It does not seem probable that any uniform pattern for teaching of English will be adopted across the country, not at least in the near future.

1.3 ELT in Gujarat

The state of Gujarat came into existence on May 1, 1960 as a result of the Bombay Reorganisation Act. The predominantly Gujarati speaking northern and western portions of erstwhile Bombay state and the regions of Saurashtra formed what is Gujarat today. A few weeks after the bifurcation, the Government of Gujarat deliberated on its own educational policy (Jadeja 1988). The Government also appointed the L. R. Desai committee to discuss the place of English in the educational set up of the
state and to study the various aspects of ELT requirements. The then Minister of Education, Late Shri Hitendra Desai addressed a press conference (June 1960) and specified his Government's stand on the teaching of English in the state that English be taught in standards VIII, IX, X and XI as a compulsory subject; and that schools be allowed to teach English as an optional subject in standards V through VII, outside the school hours. (Note: Gujarat state followed 11+4 pattern of education at that time).

It was to be understood that the Government would not release grants to pay the teachers teaching English in standards V through VII (Natraj, S. 1989). The L. R. Desai Committee presented its report in 1961 and recommended that the teaching of English at the primary level be discontinued. The learners were to receive an intensive teaching of English as a compulsory subject in classes VIII through X. As against Mr. Desai's (the then Education Minister) earlier press release, the committee decided to make English an optional subject at standard XI which was the school leaving year at that time. The Gujarat state switched over to the 10+2+3 pattern of education in 1976. It is in effect even at present.

The Desai committee advocated the Structural Approach in ELT. The Structural Approach was in vogue during those years and a set of syllabuses was framed on those lines for standards VIII through X. Standard XI was the revision stage for the language items the students had learnt during the preceding years. The committee recommended that the number of periods assigned to the teaching of English be raised from 8 to a maximum of 12 per week (Natraj, S. 1989).
English Language Teaching in Gujarat has always had to suffer because of the post-bifurcation (1960) Gujarati leaders' enthusiasm for Gandhian principles of education. Gandhi had called for the boycott of everything that bore a foreign impression. He favoured "Swadeshi" goods. He had nothing personally against English language but advocated the use of indigenous languages in place of English. The masses could not understand English and he wanted to talk to the people in a language they understood. But the Gandhians in the state vehemently opposed the introduction of English at the primary level. In the late seventies English was introduced at the primary school level but as an "optional subject".

There are many problems that English Language Teaching is faced with in the state. The syllabus and the teaching materials are "structural" in approach but in practice, most teachers adopt Grammar-Translation method. Most school teachers are trained inadequately. They are not confident even to form a few sentences in English. Our teachers are usually concerned with "finishing" the course contents of the text within a set time-limit of the academic year. Nobody cares how much language learning actually takes place. There is no exposure to English in classroom or even outside it. Even after learning English for some five to eight years our students are not capable of writing independently in English. Speaking English is almost an impossibility. Examinations are conducted but they rarely test learners' oral fluency in English. Teaching aids are nominal. Class size is usually big, something between 45 and 60 students in each English class. Teaching of English is carried out in our schools in such a way that the students either fear or hate it. Sometimes it is both.
Very few Gujaratis can be found in the lists of successful candidates in the competitive examinations at the national level. It is often pointed out that the only reason of their poor performance is their poor knowledge of English. Even in the professional courses like medicine, engineering etc. one major obstacle for the Gujarati students is English. Things do not improve much at the college level either. We do in fact have proficient teachers at college or university level. But there is much more emphasis on teaching of literature. And, whatever language teaching takes place; it is carried out through "lecture method". Teachers who have done their MA with English Literature teach students in different faculties. In the lecture sessions there are not many opportunities to improve the students’ language skills. Sometimes you find that the students do not possess adequate knowledge of the language and yet they are taught advanced composition or comprehension of literary passages. We have limited resources for education in general and for the teaching of English in particular. But what is more painful is the fact that these limited resources seem to be wasted or not properly used. Such is the state of English Language Teaching in Gujarat.

1.4 Focus on Learners

We have already discussed the ELT scenario in India and Gujarat and seen that the teaching of English in Gujarat state is traditional and not satisfactory. In the following section we turn our attention to the shift of focus from the language teaching methods to the language learner. This change of focus is an outcome of a range of experiences and experiments in the field of Second Language Acquisition. That some profitable
development in English Language Teaching will follow this shift from the teaching methods to the language learner is certain.

1.5 Behaviouristic Theory of Learning

Behaviourism or Behaviouristic learning theory viewed learning as the formation of habits (Ellis 1986). The insights gained from animal experiments were extrapolated to account for human learning. Behaviourism was a general theory of learning, which applied to all kinds of human, or animal learning. It held that a change in an individual's behaviour could be brought about through an external event (i.e. stimulus). In his famous book *Verbal Behaviour* Skinner (1957) viewed utterances (language as used by an individual) as learned responses to stimuli. Structural linguists were more concerned with the description of the sound system and the grammatical system of languages than with problems of meaning and how meaning can be expressed. The structuralists were in line with behaviourist theory of learning. Language teaching methods such as audiolingualism (prominent in 1950s) combined principles of structural linguistics on the one hand and those of behaviourism, on the other.

Behaviourism emphasized environmental factors and ignored internal or mental factors. Chomsky (1959) criticized Skinner's (1957) approach to understanding language acquisition in terms of "learned responses". He stated that simplistic notions such as "reinforcement" and "habit formation" were useless when applied to the context of human language learning. For Chomsky, language learning was a process of rule formation and not of habit formation.
This was an important development in Second Language Acquisition field. And it was to have a great bearing on second language teaching. Learners were now viewed as playing an active role in the process of language learning because they form and test hypotheses about target language rules on the basis of their exposure to second language and provide important feedback in developing a second language pedagogy (Larsen-Freeman 1991). Later developments such as - Error Analysis, Interlanguage, and Creative Construction Hypothesis emphasized the active role played by the second or foreign language learner. In the late 1950s and in 1960s the researchers were more concerned with effective methods of second language teaching. The search for the best language teaching method was inconclusive. In the early 1970s the focus of research shifted from teaching process to the learning process. The language learner provided important insights into language learning process.

1.6 Individualisation of Language Instruction

SLA researchers became increasingly aware of individual differences in second language learning context (Rubin 1975; Stern 1975; Naiman et al 1978; and Gardner and colleagues 1972, 1979, 1980). The study of learners’ styles and strategies and their attitudes and motivation for learning was indicative of the fact that the language learner held the centre-stage in second language learning research. A simultaneous development is to be witnessed in the field of language pedagogy. A welcome reaction to the inconclusive debate on the most effective language teaching method was to focus more on language learner as an individual and as a person (Stern 1983). More emphasis was laid on the need of
individualisation of language instruction. That meant a great change in the traditional language teaching methods. Learner-centred language teaching gave primacy to learners’ needs, their speed and their individual styles of learning.

The emergence of ESP (English for Special / Specific Purposes) programmes and communicative language teaching methods was also an indication that the learners’ needs were given a priority in pedagogy. Altman (1980 in Sood 1988) points out that the pendulum of foreign language education swung more in the direction of the learner who was considered the most significant variable in the process of learning. According to Altman (1980) learner-centred teaching is based on three tenets:

(1) It implies that the needs, abilities and interests of each learner determines as much as possible the nature and shape of the foreign language curriculum.

(2) It can be viewed from four perspectives: (a) personalisation of the goal of instruction to allow different learners to pursue different curricular goals in the same course; (b) personalising the means of attaining the goals; (c) personalising the rate of instruction so that the pace of learning is unique to each learner; and (d) personalisation of expectation from each learner as a result of instruction; whereby learners meet different quantitative or qualitative criteria.
Learner-centred language teaching implies tailoring teaching to the needs of the learners regardless of whether they work individually or in groups of any size.

These three tenets of learner-centred language teaching suggest what is meant by the phrase “focus on the learner”. If we have a look at some features of ELT scene in Gujarat and India, we would know that the teaching of English is not learner-centred. It is, however, true to say that more and more people working in the field are gradually realizing the need to focus on the language learner.

Traditionally, India has always revered the teachers. And, traditions are given more importance in India. In the ancient Guru-Shishya (teacher-disciple) system of education the learner was the receiver of the knowledge transmitted by the Guru. This, still, is the major approach in our schools and colleges. Learners are not supposed to have any say in the classroom. Today, English language teaching is carried out by Indian teachers who themselves were taught in the country.

At present, we cannot say that the focus of ELT is on the learner. Judging from the conditions prevailing at present, ELT in Gujarat is not going to be learner-centred, at least, in the near future. Language learners at any stage of ELT are without any clear idea as to what they want or need from language teaching programmes. The authorities in the state or universities prescribe the language courses and texts. Learners have no say in designing the course. Even their teachers are not consulted. Most often the language teacher comes to the classroom and explains the rules of...
grammar or reads out lessons standing on the platform. The students do not participate in the teaching-learning process actively. They are not even encouraged by their teachers to do so. If an intelligent student happens to ask a question, the teacher may sometimes find it inconvenient. Asking questions is not a rule but an exception. In colleges we follow a method of teaching, which is called “lecture method”. As the name suggests, the college teachers go on lecturing at or dictating notes to students. In most of the graduation courses of English there is more emphasis on teaching and understanding of literature. Very recently have we begun to understand the importance of teaching English as a language, that is, teaching our students how to use English for communication in different situations.

Usually our classes are so large that it is not possible to focus on individual learners. There is no provision for tailoring language programmes to suit the needs and styles of individual learners. Many schools and colleges have installed language laboratories but often the lab sessions are not conducted systematically and regularly. However, it is a welcome tiding that those concerned with the teaching of English have become increasingly aware of specific needs of the different groups of learners of English. As of now, a large majority of our learners cannot speak or write good English even after investing thousands of hours over ten to twelve years.

1.7 The Problem

In the preceding section we saw that ELT in Gujarat and India is not learner-centred at present, though there is an increasing awareness and
concern that it should be so. It is of utmost importance that individual learning strategies and over-all styles of learning are taken into consideration in designing and implementing language courses. The problem under study in this research project was formulated in this backdrop.

1.7.1 Statement of the Problem

"An Investigation into the Learning Styles of Gujarati Learners of English at the Undergraduate Level with a View to Identifying the Characteristics of Good Language Learner".

1.8 Definition of Terms

This section lists and defines the major terms used in this investigation. It is important to be clear about the meanings of terms such as - investigation, learning strategies, learning styles, good language learner, and undergraduate level, so that one can operationalise the investigation.

(a) Investigation:

The term ‘investigation’ is used here to signify a research study taken up with specific objectives and carried out through established procedures of educational and linguistic research.
(b) Learning Strategies:

Language ‘learning strategies’ are special devices used by learners to enhance any aspect of language learning, i.e., accession, storage, retrieval and use of information. Strategies are specific techniques adopted by individual learners to approach a certain language problem or task at hand.

(c) Learning Styles:

The term ‘learning styles’ is used here to signify the over-all learning behaviour emerging from the various learning strategies employed by language learners at the undergraduate level in Gujarat.

(d) Good Language Learner:

The term ‘Good Language Learner’ (GLL) is used here to mean those students of English who have displayed a proven command over English language by achieving a higher score at the H.S.C Board or at the last University examination.

(e) Undergraduate Level:

The term ‘Undergraduate Level’ is used here to signify the stage of education that comes after the completion of higher secondary school and that leads to a bachelor’s degree at any university in the state of Gujarat.
1.9 Objectives of the Study

The investigation was taken up with the following objectives:

(a) to identify the various types of language learning strategies;

(b) to survey the learning behaviour of the students of English at the undergraduate level;

(c) to evolve over-all learning styles of Good Language Learners of English on the basis of the learning strategies employed by them;

(d) to analyze and interpret the data regarding the learning behaviour of the Good Language Learners; and,

(e) to establish whether the difference in the learning behaviours of the Good Language Learners and the Better Language Learners is statistically significant or not.

1.10 Hypothesis

The hypotheses for the present project were formed as under:

1.10.1 There is no significant difference in the learning styles adopted by the male and the female learners;
1.10.2 There is no significant difference in the learning styles adopted by the learners in different age groups;
1.10.3 There is no significant difference in the learning styles adopted by the learners in the Arts faculty and the Commerce faculty;
1.10.4 There is no significant difference in the learning styles adopted by the learners from the Gujarati medium school background and the English medium school background;
1.10.5 There is no significant difference in the learning styles adopted by the GLLs and the BLLs in terms of their use of cognitive strategies;
1.10.6 There is no significant difference in the learning styles adopted by the GLLs and the BLLs in terms of their use of metacognitive strategies;
1.10.7 There is no significant difference in the learning styles adopted by the GLLs and the BLLs in terms of their use of social strategies;
1.10.8 There is no significant difference in the learning styles adopted by the GLLs and the BLLs in terms of their use of affective strategies.

1.11 Delimitation

The present study aims at identifying the over-all learning styles of Good Learners of English at the Undergraduate Level on the basis of the learning strategies they employ. Since this is a ‘survey’ type research project the investigator was required to select a representative sample of the universe. For this purpose, it was decided to use the random sampling method.
The scope of the study is delimited to the students of English at the undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat. Like so many states in the country, Gujarat has adopted the 10+2+3 pattern of education. Learners complete their secondary school education in the first ten years, which is then followed by two years of higher secondary school education. After that, they have to study for three years in an undergraduate college in order to qualify for a bachelor’s degree in most of the faculties. The study was not confined to the students of English Literature or to students from English medium background.

The subjects for the study are drawn from the Arts and the Commerce faculties and from first to third year of undergraduate colleges in Gujarat. Only those students who had secured 60% or more marks in English Language paper in the last exam in the previous year were approached for this study.

1.12 Relevance

The present investigation aimed at identifying general learning styles displayed by good learners of English at undergraduate level in Gujarat. The investigation was carried out through the use of a questionnaire and an interview format on learning strategies. The sample was selected through the random selection method. The subjects were drawn from different colleges affiliated to two major universities in the state of Gujarat. The questionnaire elicited data on the learners’ use of learning strategies in various language learning situations and the interview format elicited the information in further detail. Learners’ choices of learning strategies...
provide the general picture of their learning behaviour and reveal their general learning styles. This research study should help language learners as well as teachers and educators by sensitizing them to individual differences displayed by successful second language learners in our multilingual environment and educational set up.

1.13 Scheme of Presentation

The chapters of the thesis appear in the following sequence:

Chapter 1  Introduction
Chapter 2  Review of Literature
Chapter 3  Tools and Procedures
Chapter 4  Data-Collection
Chapter 5  Analysis and Interpretation
Chapter 6  Findings and Implications
Chapter 7  Conclusion

Appendix: 1 A Copy of the Questionnaire- Pilot Version
Appendix: 2 A Copy of the Questionnaire- Final Version
Appendix: 3 A Copy of the Interview Schedule- Pilot Version
Appendix: 4 A Copy of the Interview Schedule- Final Version
Appendix: 5 Transcript of the Interviews: Relevant Excerpts