CHAPTER III
GENERAL ACCOUNT OF THE STUDY

3.1 Introductory

This chapter gives an account of the study in terms of a description of the subjects of the investigation and the procedure for collection of data. It also presents the purpose of the tests and explains how they were administered.

3.2 Students Who Were the Subjects of the Investigation

The subjects of the investigation were 16 Higher Secondary (that is Junior College) students of Commerce at the S.N.D.T. Women's University, Bombay. The mother-tongue, as well as, their medium of instruction at school was Hindi. At the Higher Secondary, however, they are taught the various subjects through English. As a result students with little or no grammatical competence are required to listen and understand lectures delivered in English and read books on Economics, Book-keeping, Accounts and other related Commerce subjects in English. They are also expected to answer examination papers in English.

3.2.1 Students' exposure to and competence in English

These students have had almost no exposure to English at school. Except for having studied English as a compulsory
subject from Standard V to X in perhaps poorly equipped schools and apparently under inadequately trained teachers of English, they have had very little other exposure to English. Informal talk with students suggests that in their home environment or elsewhere they have hardly any opportunity to listen to English spoken, to speak English or to read newspapers, books, magazines in English. They view only non-English programmes on the television and perhaps read and listen to news bulletins in Hindi.

Under these circumstances they lack even basic grammatical competence in English, let alone communicative competence and the skills of speaking, reading, and writing. They cannot efficiently and satisfactorily comprehend lectures or even day to day speech in English. They have neither internalized grammatical structures nor acquired an adequate amount of vocabulary. English spelling and pronunciation pose equal problems. The importance of study skills and learning strategies has, it appears, never drawn their attention. As they have to make progress on all these fronts simultaneously, the task grows formidable. They fail to sort out and cope with the learning problems encountered each day.

\[1\] The researcher's experience as Resource Person (in 1974-75) to train Higher Secondary Teachers in Non-English Medium suggests this. /schools
3.2.2 Motivation

Only a few learners are impelled to overcome these difficulties and are truly motivated to improve their standard of performance. The majority give up the struggle but become merely examination oriented, seeking speedy and short roads to a mere pass. This is their goal in the subject of Compulsory English at least; even if they have a higher and more respectable goal with respect to commerce subjects.

3.3 Rationale of the Intensive Course

Such a batch of 16 learners, having failed in the regular first unit test, (that is test taken after the first 6 weeks of teaching) desired to be taught English after class hours. They were promised a series of lessons in reading-comprehension. Asked what problems they faced in comprehension, they said they did not understand difficult words. Their feeling that vocabulary poses an almost unsurmountable problem is not surprising. Algerian learners in Cherchalli's study (1988) express a similar view when they say:

We try to understand the words and that's all. For example, when the teacher explains the lesson, well .... I don't seek to understand the lesson, I seek to understand the words and that's it.

Another learner in the same study, who according to Cherchalli is "echoing the sentiment of many other students states."
We try to understand the words not the lesson.

The reader will notice that the students in the present study behaved in much the same way during the teaching sessions (See especially Lesson 5). One is inclined to speculate on the universality of this trait among B.S.L. learners. The researcher and the teacher who was to teach the course, therefore, felt justified in planning a course in reading comprehension with a special focus on lexis and word meaning. Some learners, however, wanted to be taught grammar. The learning of grammar seems to be the need visualized by learners in general, despite the fact that formal grammar is taught all through the school years. School teachers, it appears, focus on rules of grammar and correction of grammatical errors neglecting the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. It was therefore considered futile to offer more grammar lessons. Learners' library needs dictated the teaching of the skills of reading and it was felt that grammar would be acquired through reading. Besides, grammar is taught them in regular classes as well.

3.3.1 Choice of teaching material

Considerable thought was given to choice of material. Since one was aware of learners' examination oriented attitudes to learning and to class attendance, it was felt
that a reading passage from outside the prescribed reading text would not motivate them to come to class. At the same time it was not advisable to re-teach a passage that had already been taught in the regular class. It was therefore decided to teach a couple of passages that were not likely to be taught in the regular class until the research experiment was over. To ensure this, the teacher teaching the reading text in the regular class was requested to postpone the teaching of the two passages (intended to be taught to the research experiment group) until she was given the green signal by the researcher.

Thus, two reading passages were selected from *Yuvakbharati* for Standard XI prepared by the Maharashtra Board of Secondary And Higher Secondary Education, Pune, 1985. The two passages are entitled 'A Call to Youth' by Dr Radhakrishnan and 'The Man Who Saved Pimplesdrop' by W.J. Turner. Each passage was taught in five class periods of 45 minutes each. (See Appendix A for the 2 prose passages)

### 3.4 Constraints

#### 3.4.1 Class hours

It was extremely difficult to arrange classes at a time when a classroom was available and when all learners and the teacher were free. The students began their regular classes at 7.45 a.m. and finished at 12.50 p.m. So the research experiment classes could not be held before 1:00 p.m.
They were arranged from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Tuesdays. Quite often several learners would skip one or two of their regular classes in order to participate in voluntary extra-curricular programmes or would have free periods due to the absence of one of the regular teachers. On such occasions students were generally reluctant to wait until 1:00 p.m. for the extra (research experiment) class. It was not always possible to re-schedule classes as the teacher would arrive at 1:00 p.m. and the observer/researcher herself did not find it easy to re-schedule her own classes without prior notice. Further, the classroom assigned for the experiment was also generally engaged before 1 O'clock.

3.4.2 Problem of absenteeism

Hence, in spite of all efforts absenteeism was a serious problem. The number of absentees fluctuated from one in Lesson 4 to seven in Lesson 2. Thus Lesson 4 had the best attendance. Fifteen out of sixteen learners were present in Lesson 4 while after Lesson 6 attendance dwindled to four learners in Lesson 7 and three in Lesson 8. It improved just a little in Lessons 9 and 10 which had seven and eight learners respectively. Exasperatingly enough those present for these lessons were not always the ones who had consistently attended the earlier lessons. It is for this reason that the classroom interaction analysed pertains mainly to the first six lessons. Only occasional reference is made to the later lessons.
3.4.2.1 Reasons for absenteeism in the later lessons

Lessons 7, 8, 9 and 10 were taught after a three week Diwali break. During this post-Diwali period learners were in general distracted by the preparation for the approaching College Day programme. They participated in rehearsals of various items and also attended the Youth Festival programme for which their regular classes were specially re-scheduled allowing them to be free from 11.15 a.m. instead of 12.40 p.m. On such occasions learners requested cancellation of the 'remedial' classes as they had come to be called. As a result of such cancellations and occasional holidays the experiment had to be spread over sixteen weeks. The classes began on September 3, 1985 and ended in the second week of January 1986, with breaks for the Diwali and Christmas vacations. Consequently the teacher was generally obliged to devote a considerable amount of time and effort to recapitulating the ground covered in an earlier lesson.

3.4.3 Classroom

The room that was assigned for conducting these classes was in a different building from the one in which the Commerce faculty had their classes. One might have expected this to be a welcome change. But motivation was so poor that even the effort to move from one building to another acted as a deterrent for the learners.
Further, this building was used by the Arts faculty who finished classes just when the remedial group began. As the Arts classes dispersed, the students let loose their pent up gaiety in shouts and laughter while racing down the corridor and the staircase. This outside disturbance which lasted about ten minutes rudely disturbed the remedial classes at the beginning of each session but had to be tolerated.

3.5 Procedure for Data Collection

3.5.1 Seating Arrangement
3.5.2 **Tape-recorder**

The National Panasonic tape-recorder and a Realistic Condenser Microphone were used to tape-record each lesson. Students had been told that the objective in recording the lessons was simply to help the teacher and the observer (who was regarded as just another teacher by the learners) to identify their learning problems and to modify teaching strategies when necessary. Apparently the learners were not inhibited by the presence of the tape-recorder. The teacher too seemed oblivious of its presence as the lesson proceeded.

3.5.3 **The observer**

The observer was the researcher herself. She sat where she could see both the teacher and the learners. Much of her attention was focussed on noting down the first couple of words of as many learners' contributions as possible along with the corresponding names. This was to facilitate her in identifying the learners' voices on the tape when transcribing the lessons. Next, as the lesson proceeded, the observer prepared a short objective vocabulary test on words that were used during the interaction in the class at that session or were in the part of the text being taught. The two activities kept her so occupied that it was hardly possible to observe the students' non-verbal behaviour during the lessons. Thus it is likely that a great deal of interesting happenings in the classroom could not be recorded.
3.5.4 Distribution of class time

Each session of one hour was divided into two parts. The teacher and the learners interacted for 45 minutes. The remaining 15 minutes were spent in further data-collecting activities. When the teacher concluded the session, the learners put away their reading texts and waited for instructions from the observer.

3.5.5 Listing of uptake

Learners were each given a sheet of paper and asked to recall words and note down expressions that they did not know before but had encountered for the first time during that particular class session. The words could be those that were in the text book, they could also be those that were used by anyone (teacher/Learner(s)/Observer) during those 45 minutes. Having listed the recalled words, learners were asked to give their meaning alongside either in English or in Hindi. (All instructions were given both in English and in Hindi). Five to seven minutes were allowed for listing 'uptake' of lexis. Next, the learners were asked to turn over the sheet of paper and attempt the objective test (Post Session Test) to be written up on the black-board by the researcher.

3.5.6 Post Session tests
3.5.6.1 Purpose

The post session tests were prepared to see :-
(1) if learners could recognise word meanings even when they failed to recall words. (The researcher was aware of the fact that words may not have been noted as recalled simply because they were already known).

(2) if recall and recognition tallied at least on words that had been recalled.

(3) how far the uptake lists (of words) corresponded with the words that the observer included in the post-session test. In other words whether what was salient in the interaction was also salient for the learners. (Occasionally, however words were included in the post-session test for their usefulness, regardless of their salience in the interaction.)

(4) whether success on the post-session test facilitated long term retention and recall as measured in the post-investigation tests.

3.5.6.2 Administering the post-session tests

The observer wrote out the test while the teacher stood by vigilant to guard against any learner looking back at or adding to the uptake already recorded.

3.5.6.3 Test format

The test consisted of about 10 to 15 words listed in the left hand column, while the meanings of the words were jumbled and listed in the right hand column. The
students were required to match each word with its meaning.

A variation in the test format was introduced in lesson 6. Thus, the post-session tests which followed Lesson 6 consisted of 2 formats. The first was the one discussed above (namely, matching each word with its meaning). The second format had sentences with slots. The students were expected to fill in the slots with appropriate words which they had to select from a given list of words written up on the blackboard. This second format was more challenging as it demanded the reading of a sentence and understanding its meaning. Both formats were used in lessons 7 and 8. But few learners attended these sessions to benefit from the exposure to the new format.

3.5.6.4 Feedback

As learners were quite keen on getting immediate feedback on the post-session tests, it was provided as soon as the answer sheets had been collected.

3.5.7 Interviews with the learners

3.5.7.1 Purpose

The purpose of the interviews was primarily to probe the learners

i) in order to determine which aspects of classroom interaction and treatment of lexis had made certain

\[2\] What the interviews actually yielded was far more than anticipated.
words salient for them, and then to see if the learners' views corresponded with the teacher's and the researcher's.

ii) so as to give them an opportunity to clarify and comment on any aspect of uptake which was not clear to the researcher.

iii) in order to find out if they were aware of various learning opportunities and could use them for enhancing their language development.

iv) in order to find out whether they could themselves create learning opportunities.

3.5.7.2 Procedure

The interviews were conducted largely in Hindi. Students almost invariably spoke in Hindi while the researcher used both English and Hindi freely in order to facilitate communication. All interviews were tape-recorded. The interview tape transcripts have been freely translated into English for the reader's convenience.

3.5.7.3 Constraints

It was extremely difficult to find a common slot in the time table for interviewing learners on the day following the teaching session. The observer was therefore obliged to request students to meet her during their coffee-snack break between 10.00 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. This meant that the
students often had to forego a necessary mid-morning snack. Nevertheless learners did come in batches of 3 to 4 or 2 to 3, either during the earlier or later 15 minutes of their coffee-break so long as they regarded the interview as a novel experience. However, interest in the interview sessions soon began to wane and the researcher had to be resourceful in employing strategies that served as a bait to draw learners. They were promised help on whatever learning difficulties they brought up. As a result the interview sessions often turned overtly into study-skills sessions and only covertly and to a smaller extent remained data-collecting ventures. Although from one point of view this need to divert attention to the discussion of students' problems deprived the researcher of time for the follow-up in data collection that was planned, in other respects it provided valuable insights into students' study habits and led to interaction between the researcher and the learners which constituted further data for analysis.

Despite the help offered, at times it was not possible to meet learners until two or three days after the teaching session. Some learners could not be contacted at all even though the researcher sent out personal invitations to them.

3.5.8 **Interviews with the teacher**

3.5.8.1 **Purpose**

Interviews with the teacher aimed at eliciting her views on the classroom interaction in general and learners'
participation in particular. It was necessary to know whether in her view the lesson had been a success, whether she/learners had any problem(s) in communicating with each other, whether she had been able to keep to her teaching plan (if any), which words she intended to teach, which lexical items she focussed on and which ones in her view were likely to be claimed as uptake by the learners and for what reasons. A kind of triangulation of the views of the teacher, the learners and the observer could thus be obtained. The teacher's comments would provide useful insights into classroom processes. Further it was envisaged that the interviews would enable the teacher to articulate her feelings of satisfaction, exasperation, misgiving etc. and perhaps to discuss ways and means of helping learners to interact better.

3.5.6.2 Procedure

The researcher initially asked a few questions, for example, which words had the teacher intended to teach, which ones had she focussed on, and whether she was pleased with the way the lesson progressed. These questions and answers were recorded in the form of notes. The rest of the interview took the form of an informal spontaneous talk which was tape-recorded. (See Appendix C).
3.5.8.3 **Constraints**

Ideally these interviews should have followed immediately after each lesson. Unfortunately this was not possible as the teacher had other commitments after the teaching sessions. The researcher could meet her, at best, in the course of the week and sometimes much later. If too long a time had elapsed, the cassette tape was played back to revive her memory of the interaction during the relevant class hour.

3.5.9 **Post investigation tests**

3.5.9.1 **Purpose**

Soon after the teaching sessions had been completed, a vocabulary test was administered to the subjects of the investigation to determine how far the uptake was retained over time. As already pointed out the ten teaching sessions had necessarily to be spaced out on account of the cancellation of some of the scheduled classes, the Diwali vacation (3 weeks) and the Christmas vacation (1 week). Hence, a period of 18 weeks had lapsed between the start of the course and the Post Investigation Tests.

3.5.9.2 **Procedure**

**Selection of content**

The uptake lists were scanned lessonwise. Lexical items that formed the uptake of most learners present in a
particular session were selected for testing. The number of items as also the number of learners present varied from lesson to lesson. Thirty items were selected from lessons 1 to 6, and only 1 each from lessons 7 and 8 respectively. As the attendance after Lesson 6 had thinned down to 3 or 4 learners, these 2 items from Lessons 7 and 8 formed the uptake of 1 or 2 students only. Most of the items selected from lessons 1 to 6 were reported by at least 6 learners. The number of reporters ranged from 6 to 12. Only 7 items included from Lessons 1 to 6 constituted the uptake of less than 6 learners. The numbers in this case ranged between 2 and 5.

3.5.9.3 Constructing the tests

The 32 items selected were divided into 2 sets of 16 each. The first set of 16 items was further divided into two sets of 8 items each. Test A was based on the first 8 and Test B on the second set of 8 items. The 8 words were listed horizontally on the top of the page. The list was followed by a specially constructed passage with 8 slots. Care was taken to use context familiar to learners and simple sentence patterns. The testees were expected to fill in the slots with appropriate words selected from among

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2In retrospect, however, it appears that the context of the fourth passage may have been unfamiliar to learners.
the 8 words listed at the top of the page. Test B was similarly designed making use of the second set of 8 words. Both tests A and B necessarily required the testee to read the passages and understand the context. Test C consisted of the same 16 words as Tests A and B. In this test, the 16 words were simply listed in column A and their meanings jumbled and listed in column B. The learners were required to match the words with their meanings. Test C was thus like most post-session tests. Tests D, E and F were designed similarly on the lines as tests A, B, C; using the remaining 16 words. It was envisaged that if the learner had grasped the meaning of a word she would get it right both in the contextualized passage\(^4\) and in the isolated word list\(^5\). If a learner succeeded only in the isolated word list, her success might possibly be attributed to some extent to skill in guessing meanings through the process of elimination. It was hoped that learners would have more C1 pairs rather than merely Cs or Is. (But, see Chapter VI).

3.5.9.4 Administering the tests

Tests A, B, C were administered on one day and Tests D, E, F on the following day. About an hour's time was allowed for completing each set of tests. From each set

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\(^4\)Contextualized passage = C.

\(^5\)Isolated word list = I.
one test at a time in alphabetical order was given to the students. When all the students had completed it, the next test was distributed. Absentees took whichever set of tests they had missed on another day fixed for the purpose.

Along with the subjects of the investigation, their classmates (who had not been subjected to the investigation but whose abilities matched the ability of the experiment group) (see Unit Test, below) were allowed to take the same test. This was to see whether practice in conscious recall at the teaching sessions had paved the way for a better performance at the Post Investigation Tests.

3.6 Unit Tests

These tests were not in any way related to the experiment. They were tests taken periodically by all Standard XI students after the completion of certain units of study in Compulsory English. As the present experiment began after the results of the first unit tests had been declared, students' marks in the English Unit Test could be reckoned as an indication of their entry behaviour. These marks showed that the Hindi medium experiment group was initially only slightly better than their non-experiment group of classmates. Hence it would be possible to determine whether the additional focus on vocabulary in the remedial reading classes as well as the more conscious drawing to
light of their own failures in learning technique would lead to improved performance by the experiment group or at least those of them who had been diligent.

This chapter has presented an outline of the design of the study. The next chapter gives an account of the categories used in analyzing the data. It also explains the general approach adopted in the analysis of uptake in relation to treatment.

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